

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07998224 9



THE RELIGION OF THE
THRESHOLD

AND OTHER SERMONS



J. Say Mackay

THE RELIGION OF THE THRESHOLD

And Other Sermons

BY

DONALD SAGE MACKAY, D.D., LL.D.

*Late Minister of the Collegiate Church
of St. Nicholas, New York*

WITH INTRODUCTION BY

PROFESSOR HUGH BLACK, D.D.

NEW YORK

A. C. ARMSTRONG & SON

3 & 5 WEST EIGHTEENTH STREET

1908

COPYRIGHT, 1908
BY HELEN L. S. MACKAY

Published, December, 1908

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	vii
I. THE RELIGION OF THE THRESHOLD	25
II. OTHER LITTLE SHIPS	36
III. THE VALUE OF A DAY	50
IV. DOES IT PAY?	63
V. PETER FOLLOWED AFAR OFF	77
VI. A MAN'S RELIGION AND HIS BUSINESS	92
VII. HABIT	105
VIII. CONVICTION	118
IX. SINCERITY	129
X. DISCOURAGEMENT	141
XI. PEACE	152
XII. WHY ATTEND CHURCH?	162
XIII. CHRIST'S SECRET OF THE BLESSED LIFE	173
XIV. THE SECRET OF SELF-CONTROL	185
XV. SON, REMEMBER	199
XVI. TWO PENNIES, OR THE SOMETHING EXTRA	212
XVII. HAS CHRISTIANITY A MESSAGE TO A SCIENTIFIC AGE?	223
XVIII. THE UNREAL ELEMENT IN LIFE	236

#11
Dec 23/02
submen

	PAGE
XIX. THE BLUNDER OF THE BUILDERS . . .	249
XX. THE MAN WHO DID NO MIRACLE . . .	260
XXI. THREE MARKS OF A TRUE MAN . . .	272
XXII. THE IMPORTUNATE NEIGHBOR . . .	284
XXIII. A PLEA FOR THE SIMPLE LIFE . . .	299
XXIV. THE BIOGRAPHY OF A SOUL . . .	310
XXV. RELIGION IN HOMESPUN . . .	323
XXVI. THE MAN WITHOUT A CHANCE . . .	334
XXVII. MY FATHER'S GOD . . .	343

INTRODUCTION

DONALD SAGE MACKAY was born in Glasgow on the 20th November, 1863, and died at the early age of forty-four after a full and strenuous life. He came of a Levitical stock, and would naturally have looked to the ministry as a sphere of work. His father was the Rev. William Murray Mackay, of Glasgow, a man of deep piety and great devotion to the duties of his parish; and his only surviving brother is also a minister in that city. The main historic interest lies in the descent from his mother's side. The Sages were ministers in Scotland for generations. They came originally from the South of Scotland, but from about the Revolution period in 1688 the Sages are identified with Ross-shire, Sutherland, and Caithness. An Aeneas Sage, born at Killearnan, Ross-shire, in 1694, entered King's College, Aberdeen, in 1715, and was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Tain in 1725. From that date onward there was an

unbroken succession of Sage ministers right down to Donald Sage Mackay. Perhaps the most famous of them was the Rev. Donald Sage, A.M., minister of Resolis, who is the author of a charming book of reminiscences called "Memorabilia Domestica," which deals with the history of the Sage family and also with local matters of great interest in Sutherland and Caithness. The account given of the "Evictions" all over Sutherland, when the crofters were cleared out, is particularly graphic and is of value in the local history of the time.

On entering the University of Glasgow Dr. Mackay intended to follow the legal profession, and he actually went into a law office. He has told me often that even the short training he had in business was invaluable to him afterwards in understanding the point of view of many to whom he preached. He was impelled, however, to change his mind as to his future work, partly by a religious impulse and partly by the growing consciousness of talents suited to the ministry. His theological training was received at the New College, Edinburgh, and in 1889 he was licensed by the Presbytery of Glasgow and was soon called to a church in Aberdeenshire. This he

refused in order to pay a visit to America. He meant to return to Scotland, but during his visit he preached in the First Congregational Church of St. Albans, Vermont, and accepted the pastorate of that church. It was at St. Albans that he met and married Miss Helen L. Smith, daughter of J. Gregory Smith, the "War Governor of Vermont," and president of the Central Vermont Railroad Company. How beautiful and happy his home life was all his friends know.

At St. Albans Mackay began to make a reputation as a preacher, which brought him many calls to larger churches, but he stayed there for nearly five years and built a new church for his congregation. He then became minister of the North Reformed Church at Newark, where his success was immediate and very great. There was a large Scotch population in Newark, and he often spoke with a full heart of the short years of his ministry there. His preaching grew in power and attractiveness, and his church was crowded. Once more he was bombarded with invitations, and at last, after four years at Newark, he accepted a call to the Collegiate Church of St. Nicholas, New York, where the last eight years of his life were spent. This is the oldest

church in the city and the most influential in the denomination, and gave him a commanding platform for a very wide influence. The church he served honored him in every way possible, the two colleges of the denomination having conferred degrees on him, — Rutgers College giving him the degree of D.D., and Hope College the degree of LL.D.; and in 1906 he was elected president of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, the highest distinction the church has to bestow.

New York City is in many ways one of the most difficult places in the world to exercise the office of a Protestant minister. Some of the reasons are geographical, which compel crowds of the class who are usually the best support of a church to live at great distance from their place of work. Then, owing to the cosmopolitan character of the population, there is little unity of spirit, or even a definite civic consciousness, and still less a common religious standing-ground. No man can speak to the city even in a crisis as he may in a smaller town. Great sections of the community would not understand the speech. There is always a sense of isolation and of scattered effort, which Dr. Mackay felt in

comparison with the situation in a more homogeneous town like Newark. Further, the complete Protestant population is in a decided minority. A full quarter of the whole people are Jews, and another quarter are Roman Catholics, and when you subtract the other elements of almost every race under the sun there is left a submerged tenth of the original Protestant American Christian. The whole presents a situation that cannot be matched anywhere else in Christendom. It is a field which appeals powerfully to the heroic, but it kills its heroes by the score.

It is a great tribute to Donald Mackay that he stood the test of a post in the very heart of the difficult field and met the overwhelming problems of a pastorate in that cosmopolitan city. They were strenuous years, in which he sought to fulfill the social and public claims on him as well as the particular duties of his congregation. He might have saved himself many a time and withdrawn from many a task, but he loved the burden and bent to it with joy. He was a man of overbounding vitality, and of a temperament that is ever tempted to undertake too heavy loads. When the news came to us in New York not long ago of the death of "Ian Maclaren," I re-

marked to Dr. Mackay, who knew him well, that it was difficult to associate the idea of death with him. Since then it has often come to me that the same thing is true of Mackay himself; for he too had such an exuberance of vitality that it is hard to accustom oneself to the fact of his death. In all sorts of ways he was giving himself out, and as we now know wearing himself out also. He used to speak with a half-humorous note of the folly of giving in to the strain of New York life, but he was ever ready for the new demand on him. In one of his sermons he says that many of us think we are living the strenuous life when we are really living the strained life. "The strenuous life is living up to the measure of our strength, but the strained life is living beyond the measure of our strength." The trouble is that it was easy for a man of his eager intrepid nature to overstep the thin line between attempting enough and too much.

His social gifts and genial personality, which gave him such a wide influence and opened his way to many quarters usually shut to the ordinary minister, only increased the danger of a breakdown. He was in great request as an after-dinner speaker at public banquets and societies.

He valued the opportunity it often gave him to interest men in wider social duty and in religious service. No one in New York had the ear of leading business men for any good project as he had. But while he took more than his share of outside public work, he put the full weight of his powers into his preaching. He had many natural gifts which go to make a preacher, gifts of voice and presence and manner, with a native eloquence and fervor of utterance, something of the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum*. He had the Celtic temperament and seems to have poured himself out in his preaching, expending great nervous force, which often left him exhausted at the end. His style was often vividly dramatic, with the surge of real passion which saved it from being theatrical.

The sermons in this volume have not had the benefit of his selection or revision. They do not do justice to his preaching, as the written report rarely does to a great preacher. In this case this is all the more true because of the preacher's method of preparing. They were usually dictated and preached afterwards without manuscript, often actually unfinished, trusting to the spur of the moment for the final inspiration. It is

probably the defect of the quality of the Celtic temperament that it makes so little of method. Perhaps more method of work would have saved Dr. Mackay from much of the strain of his work, but, on the other hand, it more likely was this which made him a great preacher even if he paid the price in a short life.

His bent was not so much that of a close thinker or exact scholar — the practical demands of his position as well as his own inclination developed other qualities. He was probably also too much interested in life, and certainly he had an eye to the striking things of life, and was open to the big impressions that life can make. With all the passion and fervor which helped him to sway his audience, there was a genial outlook that attracted all sorts and conditions of people. Often a touch of genial humor comes out in the sermons, as in his description of the people who return from abroad and complain because at an altitude of five thousand feet in the Alps they did not find the delicacies which they enjoyed *six months before their season* in their own New York homes. His preaching, too, was full of shrewd and fearless judgments from a man who looked broadly and deeply at life as it

is seen in a great city, as, for example, the remark that "the two most illiterate classes in society to-day are the abject poor who by necessity must think of the needs of the body and therefore can think of nothing else, and the idle rich who by choice devote every hour of the day to the trivial problem of what they shall eat and what they shall drink and wherewithal they shall be clothed." It is easy to see with which class he has most sympathy.

His interests were ethical rather than theological. He evidently took the theology in which he was trained and used it as a convenient basis of thought to enable him to make his ethical and practical applications. At the beginning of his ministry he presented a statement of his belief, as is customary in the Congregational Church, and in it he took the traditional Protestant theology, division by division, with always this modern practical outlook. When speaking of his conception of the Divine nature, he finishes with this remark, "But indeed the Trinity has always presented itself to me less as a theological dogma than as an ethical truth, a vivid manifestation of the Divine nature adapted to human needs." The statement of belief which Dr. Mackay gave

as a young minister taking up his work would be substantially the statement he would have given at the end, with of course many amendments of the place of emphasis and changes of the relation of various parts of his creed; for he had a vital interest in the intellectual statement of the faith and brought a fresh mind to its problems. A phrase he used in that same early statement of his faith in connection with one of the doctrines is, "I accept the doctrine in its less rigid and arbitrary form." But it is evident to an intelligent reader of these sermons where he laid the stress.

It was natural that he should strive to make his church realize its responsibility towards the poor, the outcast, the suffering among the vast population of the great city. Through his inspiration his church undertook work in poorer parts of the city, and he was ever seeking to extend their sympathy and help. They supported a considerable staff of missionaries, not only at home but also on the foreign field, — in India and Arabia abroad, in Kentucky and Porto Rico nearer home. This wide interest entailed increasing work on himself; for he served on the Board of Foreign Missions and on the many important

boards and committees which represent the city's great charities. His practical interests and social enthusiasm made it difficult for him to refuse any office which was tendered him or any duty laid on him.

It is in keeping with this whole bent of his life that his sermons should be practical in the best sense, seeking ever to bring religion into contact with life and with the whole of life. The very titles in the list of contents of this volume show the place of emphasis. One of these, "Religion in Homespun," would be a fitting designation of what Dr. Mackay tried to do. He worked hard to make the religious truth he preached simple, and to bring it to men's hearts and hearths. It had something to say to a man's business and to his pleasures, to every region of his private life, his civic life, and all his social relations. Sometimes with prophetic passion he denounces ostentatious display, luxury, and extravagance; sometimes he asks for a candid examination of business methods; sometimes he seeks to arouse and educate the social conscience; and always he has his eye on the city in which he lived.

The fearless courage of many of his utterances is characteristic of the man. The twenty-

third sermon of this volume is a plea for a simple life, and in it he speaks of the menace to the state in the luxury and extravagance of the city, in the fashionable heart of which he lived and worked. It was preached in 1903, and almost with a prophetic certainty he foreshadowed the panic, which was long delayed but which visited America in 1908. "Everywhere the drags are off, and the wheels of commerce and society are running wild. When the stoppage will come, as come it must, or how it will come, no one can tell; but that this extravagance in living which New York has been following especially for the last five years is bound to end in catastrophe, moral and social, unless sanctified common-sense interposes, it needs no prophet to predict. Already the shrewd, hard-headed men in Wall Street are scenting the approaching danger from the commercial standpoint. They tell us that the limit of over-capitalization and headstrong speculation is reached, and the reaction will spell panic from the Atlantic to the Pacific. How true that may be as a commercial prediction I do not know, but from the standpoint of morality the evil results of this over-elaborated mode of living, common even among the poor as well as the rich, are already with us."

Not that he spent himself scolding and protesting. Rather, the secret of his success with men lay in his great sympathy, and tender touch, and insight into the needs of life. There was nothing sour or crabbed about his point of view. He had a large heart for the lonely, the broken of fortune, the man who is down and out. This because he had such healthy faith in human nature. He never seemed to despair of any man, even when others gave him up. The result was that he often inspired hope in a hopeless man, and put fresh courage in him to face life once more. He spared no pains and grudged no trouble to help put a man on his feet again. His patience and sympathy with the people who crowded to him for advice and assistance were a constant marvel to all his friends. Every broken down Scot in the city came to him, and many other than Scots. His pastoral work was far larger than ever his congregation knew. I know cases where he kept on trusting and hoping and bearing, when another would have given them up and when the men themselves had given themselves up, but where he won out and saw the fruit of his travail in renewed manhood and self-respecting life. This was the most wonderful thing about him,

that he warmed people by his own generous large-hearted nature and gave them new hope for the future. He was ever taking some man, outcast by his fellows for good enough cause, encouraging him and guiding him to self-respect and usefulness.

Typical of his generous chivalrous nature is a passage from a sermon of this volume, asking his people when they leave the city for the country to give their support and encouragement to the small and struggling causes. "Do not flock to the fashionable church, wherever you are. We can give you all the fashionable religion you want in New York. Think of the country minister to whom your coming, your gifts, and your attendance will be like a rift of sunlight in his lonely pastorate. Think of his struggle through the dark winter months, and the discouragements which so often beset the country ministry. Do not make that burden heavier by letting him see you drive past his church door on a Sunday morning, when you might be and ought to be worshipping in that quiet country temple amongst the hills. . . . That is the church you should support. There is where your duty lies. Do not let vulgar snobbishness switch you off to conventicles

of fashion that have neither right nor place to be." It was the sympathy of the strong for the weak.

In the more intimate relations of life, naturally known only to the few, Mackay had a genius for friendship as not many men have. Somewhat reticent and even bashful in offering his friendship, no man was more loyal and more reliable. His generous and open-hearted nature expanded in the atmosphere of friendship, and nothing was too much to do for those within that circle. He demanded much from them, but he gave more. One of them writes to me, "Once a friend of Mackay, one was bound with hooks of steel, and it was a bondage devoutly to be wished for: in it was the most delightful and satisfying fellowship." Another wrote of him: "He laid hold on his special friends with a grip that was almost too tenacious. They could not visit him too often; they could not stay with him long enough: latterly he could hardly bear them out of his sight. But on them he lavished all the unstinted wealth of his generous and affectionate and large-hearted nature." It was a remarkable trait in the character of a man of so many and varied interests, whose life was so full of occupations

and whose work was so successful. There are some who will miss him so long as life lasts. All who were privileged to know him closely realize from their own loss how great must be the sense of desolation in the more intimate relation still of wife and family.

Dr. Mackay was and remained a true Scot, with a passionate love of his native land, and never felt that a summer was complete without a sight of the dear land of the heather and the hill. During the last months of weakness, when he began to fear he might never be fit for his arduous work again, he sometimes spoke of his dream to go back and die in the old land; and yet it is fitting that he should have been buried in American soil. He loved the land where he did his work. He was, like many another true Scot, a true American also. He threw in his whole lot here, and sincerely loved the land of his adoption, and like a genuine patriot desired the best for her. Here is a characteristic passage of a sermon: "We all love our country. We believe in it, love its flag, and surely would count no sacrifice too great to defend its honor. What, then, is the best thing you could wish for your country to-day? Not more prosperity, for we are well-nigh drunk with ma-

terial wealth. Not more territory, for the vast spaces of this great land are enough to tax our energies. Surely that which we would crave most for our beloved land would be the development of men and women of Christian character and life. What we desire is to see the new generation growing up in the inspiration of those principles of integrity and honor and honesty which alone exalt a nation."

It is not hard for a man to naturalize in a land which gives a congenial sphere of work to one who seeks first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. This pre-eminently did Donald Sage Mackay, and the land he served crowned him with much love and honor.

HUGH BLACK

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
NEW YORK.

I

THE RELIGION OF THE THRESHOLD

The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. — PSALM cxxi. 8.

“GOING out and coming in,” — these words gather up what for most of us is the daily routine of life. For tens of thousands of toilers in this city the humdrum monotony of each day, year in and year out, is just a going out in the morning to labor and a coming in at evening to rest. Some go out with energy and hope, others with apathy and weariness; some return at evening with joy and contentment, others with jangled nerves and aching hearts. Between these two things — the exits and the entrances of the day — lie the whole problem and struggle of existence. Between the going out in the morning and the coming in of the evening stretches the trivial round, the common task, the dull monotony, and the pitiless struggle, — everything, in fact, that makes up the warp and woof and texture of living.

There are not only the monotonous, but the unexpected things, which meet us between the

going out and the coming in of our days. In all our lives there are some days that burn themselves into the memory and leave their brand upon our hearts. There are dramatic days in the most prosaic experience, when the curtain rises in the morning with a song and falls again at evening with a wail. Some go out in the morning who never return at evening. In Tennyson's familiar lines in his "In Memoriam":

"Never morning wore
 To evening but some heart did break.
 Oh father, wheresoe'er thou be
 Who pledgest now thy gallant son,
 A shot, ere half thy draught be done,
 Hath stilled the life that beat from thee.
 Oh mother, praying God will save
 Thy sailor, while thy head is bowed,
 His heavy-shotted hammock shroud
 Drops in his vast and wandering grave.
 Expecting still his advent home,
 You ever met him on his way
 With wishes, thinking, Here to-day,
 Or Here to-morrow will he come."

But there is another side to this. Thank God, the surprises of a day are not all tragic and sad. Our goings out lead oftentimes into the paths of unexpected joy and blessing as well as into those of sorrow. Some go out, for example, as did young Saul of Kish, who went out in the morning to seek his father's cattle and came in again at evening anointed as the first King of Israel.

Going out to seek a drove of wandered asses, he returned at evening to find a kingdom. So for many another the surprises, the unexpected blessings, of a day may be so wonderful, so full of change, that all of life ever after is different, radiant with new purpose, because of some unexpected blessing that came when we went out, as we thought, to face the familiar round of commonplace duty.

So our days follow one after another, and running through them all, binding them together, you may trace these two threads, — the gray thread of the monotonous and the scarlet thread of the unexpected, — but which day shall come to us woven with the dull gray of monotony and which with the gleaming scarlet of the unexpected, whether of joy or of sorrow, you or I may never know. We go out and we come in, but what shall happen in between only God Himself can tell.

“Well, what of it?” you ask. What practical message has all this? Simply that the supremely practical religious question for every one is this, Under whose shelter and under whose guidance shall our individual days be lived? Here, then, our Psalmist meets us: “The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.” That is to say, the faith of this man lays hold of God’s watch-care in these two extremes of the day. Whatever may happen in between, this at least

is certain, — the keeping ministry of God's love overshadows him as he goes out in the morning, and it still is waiting to welcome him as he comes in again at evening.

I picture the writer of this Psalm as a simple farmer somewhere in the valleys around Jerusalem. His outlook on life is pastoral. The framework of his daily landscape is set within the circling hills which rise around him on every side. As he goes out from the homestead in the dewy morning, his eyes instinctively lift themselves in adoration to the dawn-clad hills whence cometh his help. Those hills in their everlasting strength are the symbol to him of the Divine care which overshadows his life. And as he comes home again in the falling night, from the heat and toil of the day, I picture him once more looking backward on those same hills "as they gather gray cloaks of night about them, the silent sentinels of his protection." The moon, perhaps, in Oriental splendor rises above these clear-cut peaks, and as he shuts his door he comforts himself with the thought that as the Lord had protected him from the sun's heat by day, so the Lord will keep him from the smiting of the moon by night. So, with the prayer "The Lord shall keep me in my going out and coming in," this simple soul, with the faith of the everlasting in his heart, closes the door of his home and gathers his family circle together for the evening meal; and, who

knows, being a poet, he teaches his children to sing together, before they retire for the night, this Hebrew version of the "Cottar's Saturday Night," this hymn of protection under the Divine watch-care which "neither slumbers nor sleeps," — "The Lord is thy keeper. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep"; and with that thought the lights in the cottage go out and the little homestead in the valley nestles in safety beneath the shadow of the everlasting hills of God's protecting love.

Such, then, is the faith which this Psalm interprets so beautifully. This man's religion might be described as the religion of the threshold. That does not mean that he does not pray to God in his home or in his toil, but for him the Divine presence is somehow focused at his own door as he goes out and comes in each day. He keeps daily tryst with God on the doorstep of his home. Well, it is a simple kind of religion, is it not, my friends? and yet I venture the statement that if there were more of it in New York to-day there would be more stalwart Christian men in business life, more real solid character in public affairs, and more true family religion in our homes. The religion of the threshold would make impossible a great many scandals, outside of the home and inside of the home, that are so tragic and frequent to-day. This spirit of prayer in our goings out and our comings in would sweeten the bitterness

of life, soften the hardness of worry, transfigure the dull monotony of duty, and ennoble our whole scheme of living, as nothing else in all the world. Suppose you try it for a week. Get into the habit each morning and evening of meeting God for a moment on the threshold as you go out and come in, and though you may not see it, others will begin to see a new element of strength and tenderness in your character. I say the man and woman who keep tryst with God at the threshold for just a moment each day as they go out and come in are ready for every contingency, — yes, every emergency that the day may bring. “The Lord keep me and help me this day as I go and as I come.”

Of course, to offer that kind of prayer means that you and I are determined to live a certain kind of life. This prayer is a test of a man's life, the willingness to live a certain kind of life at home and abroad. If I go out in the morning to rob my fellow mortals, to get the best of them by means fair or foul, to swindle in business, or if I go out to live a shameful life, to do things unworthy of my manhood, or if I go out to loaf in my business and render the poorest kind of service to my employers, then to pray, “Lord, preserve my going out this day” becomes a mockery. This prayer is not an incantation, it is a benediction. It implies a heart that has resolved to do the best it can in the face of temptation and difficulty.

So with our coming in. What is the use of my saying, "Lord, bless me in my coming in this night," if I come in with a scowl, having no thought but for my own selfish comfort, and go out again to dissipate the night away? For such home-comings the prayer and its promise are futile, for prayer and promise imply a heart that has resolved to do the best it can. As I understand it, this prayer that God will bless us in our comings in means that we are not going to bring into the home, to disturb its peace, our own selfish worries and our own irritable tempers. The prayer implies a spirit of such absolute trust in God that at the threshold, before we turn the key in the door, we leave in His hands all the business worry and anxiety of the day, knowing that He will help us when we go out again in the morning.

There are three definite blessings on which we may surely count every day as we go out and come in, if we live this religion of the threshold.

I. It will redeem the monotony of the day, it will sweeten its drudgery, it will help us to bear bravely and with unembittered hearts the constant grind of commonplace routine. We speak a great deal about the monotony of life, and yet a good deal of it lies in our own hearts. It is we who create all of the commonplace in our circumstances; it is we who make the daily path prosaic and dull. If our hearts were fresh, if our spirits

had in them the spring of an eternal youth, we should find in every day new revelations, new visions, new opportunities. To eyes that can see, in the dull monotony of every day there are gleaming moments which, like springs in a desert, refresh the jaded soul. To put this not exactly on a spiritual level, that is one of the perpetual blessings we owe to a writer like Charles Dickens. He knew the seamy, sordid side of life as few men ever did, and yet how he has made the seamy side of life sparkle with a fund of inexhaustible humor and pathos, because he carried through it all a heart that was keen to see the brighter side. Oh, it is a simple kind of religion, this religion of the doorstep, but it makes many a dull day bright.

II. The second blessing which this spirit of prayer on the threshold will bring will be to make us ready for the unexpected things in life. As I have said, there are always days which come into our experience laden with the unexpected. We are called upon constantly to face some new trial, to bear some unanticipated burden, to step into some new line of duty, or perhaps to see the toil and prosperity of years in ruin at our feet; and it is these unexpected trials or blessings that test the stability of a man's character. So many people go to pieces before the unexpected. Unexpected prosperity turns an honest man into a profligate; unexpected adversity turns a cheerful man into a

misanthrope. But if we are carrying with us each day the thought of God's keeping care, the unexpected things will be dissolved. There will be grace sufficient for us to meet and overcome them. Oh, a simple religion this religion of the doorstep, but it will save us from many an unexpected temptation.

III. The third blessing which this faith will bring will be to hallow our evenings and sanctify our moments of rest. If the Lord is blessing our comings in when the day's work is done, it means that our home life will be more restful. Family life will be more full of Divine presence. We shall be more thankful for the blessings which cluster round home, and there will thus come into the evening of life a sweeter, more blessed spirit, which will take away a great deal of the fret and irritation of life in the world. Of course, that reminds us of the last evening when you and I come home and cross the threshold for the last time. There is always one last time when you or I turn our street corner, climb the stoop, turn the key, and enter the familiar room — to go out no more. It will be good to feel that the Lord is still with us on that last evening, so that when we go out through the gateway of death we shall come in again upon the other side over the threshold into our Father's house. Oh, a simple religion this religion of the doorstep, but death will be sweeter if we have learned to keep trust with God as we go out and in.

These are simple thoughts, my friends, but if we can translate them into the commonplace duties of every-day life and character it will be a richer thing for all of us. As I have been speaking about the religion of the threshold, I have been thinking of that other wonderful verse in the Book of Revelation, where you remember Christ speaks of Himself as standing on the threshold of a man's life. "Behold," He says, "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." It is a beautiful picture. The word "sup" suggests the evening, and I suppose the thought in Christ's mind was that some one had come home and shut the door behind him without asking God's presence to follow him to his own fireside. The door is shut, but Christ is on the threshold knocking at the door. Some of you possibly have seen Holman Hunt's wonderful picture illustrating that text. Christ, with the crown of thorns upon His brow and a look of infinite patience upon His face, is standing at the door, with one hand knocking and with the other holding a lantern to guide His feet through the night. When the picture was finished, Hunt asked a friend to examine it and make suggestions upon it. The friend expressed his admiration, but said, "Hunt, you have forgotten something, you have made a mistake"; and Hunt replied, "What have I forgotten, what mistake

have I made?" "Why," said the friend, "you have painted a door without any handle upon it." "No," said the artist, "on this door the handle is on the inside." It is for us to open the door, for Christ will not force Himself across the threshold on any life. We must meet Him on the doorstep and welcome Him there if He is to be the joy of our hearts.

II

OTHER LITTLE SHIPS

And there were also with Him other little ships.

MARK iv. 36.

WE don't often think of these other little ships that were beating through the storm that night on Galilee. We have, indeed, thought of the disciples in their boat, tugging with short, quick gasps at the oar, and turning at last in the panic of despair to the worn and weary Jesus asleep in the stern — "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" But how many of us have appreciated this little touch in Mark's description, "There were also with Him other little ships"? Out yonder, where the mists mantled the tumultuous waters like a wraith of death, where the roar of the gale thundered over the smitten waves and the footsteps of the storm left tracks of beaten foam, there were "other little ships," unseen in the darkness, each fighting its way for life, and each with its terror-stricken crew. Only, unlike the disciples, for them there was no Christ aboard, to whom in the supreme moment of peril they could turn for help. These other little ships had their own battle to fight.

Here is the point — the point on which this sermon turns: When Christ spoke the word of peace and calmed that storm, the calm brought safety not only to His immediate followers; it was shared also by the “other little ships.” In other words, what the Master did directly for one, He did indirectly for a great many others. The blessings of His peace were not confined to the men who had invoked His help. These blessings were diffused across the sullen waters of the lake, so that when the storm was over and the wind began to die away in fitful sobs amongst the hills, and the stars shone forth once more in the wind-swept sky, it was not one, but many little ships, that with tattered sails and straining timbers, but with thankful hearts aboard, sailed into the harbor beneath the hill, delivered from the perils of the deep, safe home at last.

Such is the story. These other little ships were the recipients that night of unseen and unrecognized blessings.

I. These other little ships remind us of the *unseen comradeships in life*. We are not alone in the storms of life. With you, though you may not know it, there are other souls fighting the same kind of battle through sorrow and temptation, and in their courage and endurance you ought to find a certain inspiration. Wonderful is this ministry of the unseen sympathy of life. It is good for us, surely, once in a while to be re-

minded of it, and to send across the waters a friendly cry, and hold up perhaps a kindly light through the driving murk.

I once crossed the Atlantic in late December. We had been shut down in the cabin for several days, but one afternoon just before nightfall, when the wet, wintry sunset smeared the southern sky, I crawled up to the slippery, solitary decks. Around me was the great waste of waters, heaving like a fevered bosom, and already black with the shadows of approaching night. There was not a human being that I could see on deck, and one never felt more acutely the sense of absolute loneliness. On every hand were the tumbling, chasing, foam-streaked waves; underneath, the creaking, laboring ship — but not a sign of life in the darkening day. Just as I was about to turn to go down to the warmly lighted cabin, suddenly upon the ragged edge of the horizon I saw the flashing of a light. Nearer and nearer it drew to us, and in a few minutes we picked out the lines of a gayly lighted ship upon its voyage. Signals were exchanged, and in its presence there came into that wintry night a sense of fellowship that destroyed the loneliness that a few moments before had been so oppressive.

Well, is it not so when some great suffering sweeps over the soul? What is it that makes those greater sorrows which once or twice at least darken every life so hard to bear, but this

sense of utter loneliness? There is a solitariness in these staggering griefs which seems to cut us off from the ordinary friendships of life. "Ah!" you say, "no one can understand how hard and bitter my sorrow is. No one can realize how much I have to bear or how much I have come through." It is that sense of loneliness that makes so many people desperate, — makes them lose faith and courage, lose all interest in life, so that they are ready to turn anywhere, go anywhere, do anything but the right thing, so as to forget the intolerable loneliness of their hearts. Thus discouragement becomes so often the vestibule of temptation.

But what about the other little ships? Neither you nor I are alone in our grief and suffering. Out yonder on the ocean of life other men and women are going through the same experience, bearing the same burdens, facing the same kind of loss, passing through the same sort of sorrow; and if we could but remember their unseen presence around us, their courage and patience, would we not, many a time, take fresh heart, believing that some day the calm must come, and we shall see again the lights of home upon the shore?

There is a pathetic little incident in the *Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, published two or three years ago, which illustrates the sort of comfort that comes to one from the sense of this unseen comradeship. In his early days Stevenson was a

frail, fragile little child suffering from a hacking cough, which often kept him awake night after night. He had a devoted Scotch nurse, to whom he owed everything — Alison Cunningham — and to whom, as you may remember, he dedicated one of his books. Often, when the boy could not sleep, this faithful soul would lift him in her arms and croon to him some of the old Scotch songs to pass away the hours of darkness until morning. But sometimes, when the little fellow was more than ordinarily restless, she would carry him to the window in the silent night, and across the square in front of the house she would point out here and there other lighted windows, “where,” says Stevenson in referring to it, “we would tell each other that there were perhaps other little children who were sick, and who, like us, were waiting for the dawn.” What a picture it is, — the frail little child looking wistfully out into the black night and taking comfort from these lighted windows where perhaps there were other little children who were sick and like him were waiting for the dawn! Ah, wondrous power of human sympathy! How true it is that it is the lights of friendship that gleam here and there through the darkness of our nights of sorrow that help us to wait for the breaking of God’s dawn!

Clearer and more radiant than any human friendship is the shining of Christ’s sympathy

through the gloom of our sorrows. It is the sympathy of Jesus that brings Him closer to me than any other quality in His character. I adore His sinlessness, I bow before His wisdom; but my heart clings to His sympathy. Somewhere in the storm I know He is, and through the tumult of the gale I can hear Him say, "It is I; be not afraid."

What is true of sorrow is also true of temptation. There is an awful loneliness in moral struggle. A man finds himself in the grip of some besetting sin which haunts him day by day. There is no hour in his life perhaps when he is free from its solicitation, and the struggle against it makes his years dark with storm. What makes the struggle for that man so pitiless is that he cannot speak of it. He must carry it in his own heart. He must fight it in the secret places of his own life, and many a man fails just because he cannot unburden his heart. He dare not tell the secret story of his struggle. You may meet him in the morning with a bright smile, and you know nothing of the night of tempest which has swept across his soul and thrilled his inner life with voiceless agony.

Yet, once more, there is the thought of the other little ships. There are other men who have the same struggle to fight, and who through it all are keeping a brave heart. Through that same kind of temptation, whatever it may be, that you,

my brother, may have to-day, some of God's strongest saints and noblest servants have been tested and strengthened. Remember, there is no temptation sent to us beyond our powers of endurance. The storms of moral struggle are intended to strengthen your will and test the power of your faith. Don't lose heart. Don't permit yourself to founder in the darkness. Somewhere near you is the great Pilot Himself, and in faith and confidence upon Him you will come safely through, and for you at last the lights of home and safety will shine.

These other little ships remind us also of the unseen fellowship in death. We have all thought sometimes of the loneliness of that last experience. There is nothing more solitary than the deathbed. Friends may gather round it, but how profound is the separation between the soul that is leaving life and those who are standing upon the shore! It is a moment from which the bravest shrink, when we must stand up before the half-open casement and look out and see stretching before us that unknown voyage "from whose bourne no traveler returns." No wonder that the soul shrinks from the loneliness of that journey. Yet again there are the other little ships. Every moment there are other souls passing out into the darkness of that great sea of eternity. And over them is the light of God's love; with them is the guidance of Christ's presence; and

it need not be lonely for you and me if in trust on Christ we take that last voyage of human life.

When that brave soul, Charles Kingsley, lay dying in one room, and his wife, dangerously ill in another room, was not expected to recover, — their first separation in a married life of unclouded love and confidence, — she sent him a message one day, to ask if he thought it cowardly for a poor soul to tremble before the mystery of that unknown world. “Not cowardly,” was his response; “but remember, it is not darkness we are going to, for God is light; not loneliness, for Christ is with us.” What are we in that last experience of life, but like those other little ships who all made port at last because of One who was with them, and before whose presence even the shadows of death melt into radiant light?

II. These other little ships have a more practical message perhaps even than that. They remind us of the *unseen* and too often *unappreciated blessings* which come to us in life.

How many, do you suppose, of these other little ships that came safely into port that night knew to whose word they owed their safety? How many of these hardy seamen, when in after-days they described that tempest, — the worst perhaps they had ever known on the Sea of Galilee, — realized that the calm which came so swiftly in the wake of the storm was due to the presence of One whose word the wind and the sea obeyed?

Well, it is a parable we all can read. The world is full of unappreciated blessings. You, for example, my friend, are to-day what you are, possess what you have, through influences which you cannot explain. You are like one of the other little ships. You have shared the blessings of some other soul which have overflowed into your life. Away back in your past there was a praying father or mother, and the answers to their prayers have repeated themselves in your experience. I sometimes hear men excuse their lack of interest in religious things because as children they were so strictly brought up, amongst such Puritanical surroundings, that they were really driven out of the church when they were able to choose for themselves. So they say, and meantime they have gone on prospering; they have come safely into the port of success without loss or damage. But do they ever think how much of that success is due to the stern old father who, for all his strictness, prayed night and morning for their welfare, and to whose prayers to-day they owe everything they have before God? Ah, friends, it is not chivalrous, it is not fair, to throw back the causes of our spiritual indifference on those for whose sake and through whose faith God has blessed us so richly.

Do you realize how strong are the indirect influences of life? — often, I think, more potent even than the direct influences. No storm in life

was ever stilled for you in answer to prayer without some other soul near you feeling indirectly the effects of that calm and peace. Christ never yet answered a prayer of yours for deliverance from great trial without diffusing the answer to that prayer through other lives which perhaps never knew His name.

“More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of; wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me day and night.
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

Look, for example, at the history of Christianity. What is the record of the Church in the history of these nineteen centuries but a repetition writ large of the story of the other little ships? More wonderful even than the progress of the Church itself is the multitude of things which through Christ's influence have been indirectly blessed. Sometimes people criticise the Church because she does not go into this reform and that, because she does not deal with social or economic problems, because she does not directly support hospitals, asylums, homes for the friendless, and so on. The Church has her own business to do — to preach Christ and His love to the uttermost — and all these other things, charities, hospitals, homes, reforms, and the like, are like the other little ships which have come in the

wake of Christ's influence and follow the leading of His Spirit.

“You never can tell when you do an act
Just what the result will be;
But in every deed you are sowing the seed,
Though its harvest you may not see.
Each kindly act is an acorn dropped
In God's productive soil;
Though you may not know, yet the tree shall grow,
And shelter the brows that toil.”

That is what makes a man's personal decision for Christ so solemn a thing. He never knows the other souls who through that decision of his are brought into touch with Christian living. It is not only that his own home life, his wife and children, feel the blessing of his stand for righteousness, but out yonder in the world, where the tumult of life is beating, amongst his business associates, amongst many whom perhaps he never supposed thought of such things, his spiritual decision becomes a silent influence for good, and in ways he cannot tell he brings with him into the harbor of Christ's love these other little ships that have shaped their course by his. As George Eliot puts it very beautifully in “*Middlemarch*”: “The growing good of the world is greatly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is greatly owing to those who have lived hidden lives and rest in unvisited tombs.”

So I make this appeal this evening to the man who is not yet openly a Christ man. It may be that heaven would not be much poorer if you or I should never get there, and it may be heaven would not be much richer if you or I should get there; but this is the point: There may be some other soul whom in God's providence only you or I can influence and whose decision, swayed by us, will result in blessings incalculable in spreading Christ's kingdom. Because of that other man, whose life redeemed to God will mean far more than your influence perhaps will ever be, but whom you alone can save, I ask your decision for Christ this evening. Is there no "other little ship," no friend, no son or daughter, whose shipwreck would be an eternal sorrow to you, yet for whose sake you are willing to make Christ the Pilot of your life? You say perhaps, "I can hold that child of mine to-day. I am not afraid of losing my influence over my son or daughter now." Very true; but a day of temptation may come — nay, will come; some black night of storm and tempest will sweep over that boy's life, when nothing but the memory and the influence of Christ's grace, revealed through you, will save him from foundering beneath the angry waters. Where would you be to-day but for a Christian father or a Christian mother? Are you not willing, then, for the sake of these other souls, to make a decision now for the open acknowledgment of Christ as your Master and Saviour?

I was reading in that interesting book on the South African war, by James Barnes, "The Great War Trek," an incident at the battle of Magersfontein, where, in the early hours of a December morning of slashing rain, the Highland Brigade was almost annihilated by a party of Boers lying in ambush. Column after column of these brave Highlanders went down that hill to certain death, and before the morning had passed no fewer than eight hundred and fifty-six of them were killed, and as many more desperately wounded. During a lull in the battle, when it almost seemed as if the Highlanders had lost heart, there came wandering into an open space a piper with his pipes under his arm. An officer, Major Anson, who was killed an hour after, rushed up to him and said in the Scotch dialect, "Blaw, man, blaw your pipes!" The piper replied, "I canna; my lips are dry." The officer tried to pull out his water bottle from his belt and give the poor fellow a drink, but was unable to do so. The man knelt down, and putting his mouth to the neck of the bottle drew a long draught. Then into the muggy, misty air the skirl of the pipes was heard once more, playing the well-known tune, "Hey, Johnny Cope, are ye wakin' yet?" As he stood there marking time with the stamping of his foot, gradually from different places his comrades began to gather round him. Other pipers joined in the tune, and

presently the tide was stemmed once more. The men were sifted into regiments and then into companies. Parched with thirst and weary with the long fight, they stood there in the lines mopping their faces on their coat sleeves. And once more the charge was made, and although at enormous loss, the advance was made. It is a vivid picture of the influence of *one man* in the supreme moment of necessity. Who can tell — God knows — but that you may be that one through whose stand, open and confessed, for Christ not one but many souls will be turned to righteousness? Remember the other little ships!

III

THE VALUE OF A DAY

Are there not twelve hours in the day? — JOHN xi. 9.

MY text is Christ's definition of a day: "Are there not twelve hours in a day?" "And what of it?" you ask. This much, at least; the day is a great deal longer than some people seem to imagine. It is indeed one of the dreariest, as it is one of the oldest, of moral reflections, which forever dwells upon the shortness of time and the swiftness of its flight. More mournful eloquence and doleful poetry have been inspired by that one theme than by any other in the catalogue of human thought. Of course, time is short and its flight is swift, but are there not twelve hours in the day? To each man sufficient time has been given to do the task assigned to him. That is the solemn practical truth emphasized by our Saviour here, and it is one that perhaps we hardly ever think of, — not the shortness of time, but its abundance, its sufficiency for the tasks of life. Are there not twelve hours in the day? Abundance of time to do the duties which must be done, to bear the burdens which must be borne, to face the trials which God sends.

At the outset I want you to see how these words of Christ rebuke two very opposite but very common tempers which men assume in regard to time and its opportunities. On the one hand, Christ rebukes here that morbid spirit which in hopeless impotence is forever bewailing the shortness of time, its loss of opportunities in the past and its smallness of opportunities in the present. "Oh, if I had only done so and so twenty years ago, how much better off I had been to-day!" one man exclaims, and he sits down in a sort of sentimental fatalism over the grave of his dead past, bewailing his unhappy lot, but making no real effort to better it. To such a man Christ says in effect, "Never mind the past; it is gone, you cannot recall it; but are there not twelve hours in the day? Do the best you can with this day and its precious hours." Vain regrets for the past are the worst kind of dissipation of the present.

On the other hand, these words not less strongly rebuke that opposite spirit which, because life seems to stretch through a long vista of seventy or eighty years, is prodigal of its time, thinks that the duties of the present can well enough be mortgaged on the opportunities of the future. "What does it matter, after all, if a young man squanders a few years in sowing his wild oats? Nature is generous, you can bank on her resources. A few years of misspent time — well, it won't matter twenty years after this." So,

in effect, many men argue; so they stake life and immortality on the chances of the future. And to that temper Christ says, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" Only twelve! Steal ten of them for sin to-day and you cannot give twenty-two of them for God to-morrow. Only twelve hours! Sufficient to do life's duties in, but not sufficient to serve God and the devil in. Twelve hours! Abundance of time, but not a moment too much, not a second too many.

"Are there not twelve hours in the day?" It was Jesus Christ who asked that question. Have you never been struck with what I must call the frugality of Christ, not only in respect of time but of everything else? Christ was pre-eminently a frugal man, not prodigal with His resources, not spendthrift with His powers. He had the riches of the universe in His grasp. No millionaire that ever lived could command such resources; and yet when out of these resources He had fed a multitude of five thousand people, what was it He said to His disciples? "Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost." He was anxious for the crumbs. Frugal, not parsimonious, He realized the value of the little things in life.

So, too, in this matter of time. From everlasting to everlasting He is God. "Before Abraham was, I am," — the heir of all the ages. And yet He counts life by its hours, twelve hours in the day, whilst we, the frail, helpless children of

a day, presume to measure life by its years. How old are you? And the young man in the exuberance of his vitality counts life by its years, and replies, "Twenty, — thirty years old." "How old art thou?" said Pharaoh to the aged Jacob. And the patriarch, though he was a hundred and thirty-seven years old at the time, counted his life by its days, and Jacob said unto Pharaoh, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been." It was by its days that the old man reckoned life. So, too, you remember the prayer of Moses: "So teach us to number," not our years, but "our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Have you ever noticed how much more keenly this sense of the value of a day is forced home upon us the nearer we come to eternity? It is when the soul stands upon the shore of a boundless eternity that it begins to think of how much a day, an hour, a moment, means. "A million of money for an inch of time," cried the great English queen, after sixty long years on the throne. A million of money for an inch of time! The nearer we get to eternity, the more precious the moments become. And Christ, who lived in the atmosphere of eternity and who alone hath immortality, counted life by its hours, twelve hours in the day, — enough, but not enough and to spare.

These words, then, emphasize our responsibility

of the matter of time. The man who has learned that lesson is a greater man, with more capacity for usefulness, even than he who has learned his responsibility in the matter of money. Time is the changeless standard in the commerce of the soul. Time is the coinage of eternity. Time is the raw material out of which character is made and destiny determined.

There are a great many of us who constantly cry out for more time. The days, we say, are too short. "Oh, if we had more time, how much more we could do!" As a matter of fact, it is not more time that we need, but power to use the time we have, — power to fill up the hours of life with honest, faithful toil. Rare, indeed, is that power. Seldom we meet people who are able to translate this power to use time into constant activity. Some people are regular only in their irregularity. They have reduced the system of being unsystematic to a science, — like a famous Duke of Newcastle whose biographer said, "His Grace loses an hour every morning, and spends the rest of the day in looking for it." For many people the chief occupation in life is similar to that of this royal duke. One of the saddest retrospects, I think, in life is that which comes to the best and most earnest of us as we remember with a rush of shame how many hours have slipped from our grasp unblest, leaving nothing behind them but a record of wasted energy. Some of us

hate to be called "behind the times," but have no compunction in being behind the time of day.

I want, of course, to emphasize especially the spiritual aspect of this subject, and yet it cannot be out of place altogether to remember that this power of using the hours of a day and gathering up these precious fragments of time, frequently called "odd moments," is really the secret of some of the most successful lives. One of the striking testimonies of biography, indeed, is this, that a great many enduring reputations in the world have been built out of the "odd moments" of life. Men otherwise long since forgotten are remembered to-day for what they achieved in odd moments in the twelve hours of a day. One of the best translations of Lucretius, the great Latin writer, was the work of a busy London doctor while going his daily round among his patients. A great musician learned French and Italian while riding from one musical pupil to another. Kirk White learned Greek while walking to and from a lawyer's office, so that he was enabled to graduate with honors in the university. One of the ablest legal treatises in the French language was written by a man in the somewhat depressing interval which precedes the serving of the evening meal, after he had come home from his office. Elihu Burritt taught himself eighteen ancient languages and twenty-two European languages while

waiting for the horses to be shod in his blacksmith shop. Such examples teach us forcibly the possibilities that lie in the fragments of time that are so often neglected on the bargain counter of life. How abundant are the hours of the day for the noblest tasks of life if we would but seek grace to use them aright! "Redeeming the time," says the Apostle. How many of us ask God's grace each day we rise, to use the twelve hours aright, for His glory and for the benefit of our fellowmen?

Do we realize this privilege of twelve hours a day sufficiently? I am quite sure if we did we should not say so often as we do that we have no time. We should not waste so much time in talking platitudes about the shortness of time. We should be up and doing, and living life in earnest and not in spasms. Yet think how many squander these precious twelve hours day by day. Think, for example, of the hours of idle reveries, useless, aimless dreaming, respectable loafing, that many of us give ourselves up to throughout the day. It is not, perhaps, that our thoughts are vicious or impure, but simply that our minds get into a state of suspended animation, during which an uncurbed fancy makes havoc of our will power, paralyzes our energy, and robs us of the day's most precious opportunities. Meditation, indeed, is not idleness, — quiet, restful thought, in which the soul dreams its visions for service, is not

wasted time. But the mistake so many of us make is that our moments of meditation are lost in hours of idle dreaming which leads us nowhere save only into the mazes of selfish indulgence and sentimental fancy. Twelve hours in the day, and how many lost in foolish dreaming!

Think, too, what waste in gossip, in heedless, thoughtless talk. It is not that we are deliberate scandal-mongers, but simply that to pass the time we indulge in a kind of talk about our neighbors and friends the results of which for evil are greater than we may ever know. Who can estimate the reputations that have been wrecked, the lives of promise that have been crippled, the usefulness for good in the world that has been checked, by the retailing of evil slander throughout the twelve hours of the day?

Once more, think of the hours consumed in the pursuit of merely selfish pleasure. Indifferent to the bitter cry of outcast humanity, callous to the great moral needs of the hour that come knocking at our doors, how many of us use up the twelve hours in the pursuit of schemes whose one purpose is for self and self alone. Busy we may be, but so busy with the affairs of self that we have no time to spend for the common good, for the needs of man or the glory of God. Many of us think we are living the strenuous life when in reality we are living the strained life. The strenuous life is living up to the measure of our strength,

but the strained life is living beyond the measure of our strength. Twelve hours! and all of them strangled upon the altar of self, — not one given to God, to wing its way upward like incense before the eternal throne!

Once more, think of the hours that are murdered by the commission of positive sin. Many of life's sins are thoughtless acts of impulse, but not all of them. An hour of actual sin oftentimes means two hours of contemplated sin. For many people the twelve hours of the day are divided into hours of sinful purpose, in which evil is planned, and hours of sinful deed, in which evil is committed. You spoke a cruel word yesterday, perhaps. It wounded as you uttered it. It brought the tears if it did not arouse the temper of the one to whom you spoke it. Only a moment was needed to utter it, but how many hours had you been thinking of it, brooding over the slight, and preparing the venom of which that bitter word was but the sign? God will judge us more for the hours wasted in contemplated sin than for the moment taken to commit it.

So the day dies into night. So the twelve hours slip away into the mists of the irrevocable past, and the solemn tolling of the bell of time peals out the speeding moments, and at the close where do we stand? Twelve hours given by God, and how many lost in useless dreaming, how many lost in idle gossip, how many lost in selfish com-

fort, how many murdered in actual sin; and what is left for God, for Christlike service, for deeds of charity, for errands of mercy, for prayer, for meditation? How many? Often not one.

Look back upon the week that is gone, with its treasury of hours, and what record have they left upon the tablets of the soul? How many hours of last week witnessed you on your knees before God? How many hours did you give to prayer? How many hours did you give to studying the Bible? How many to thinking thoughts of love and translating them into deeds of kindness? How many to crucifying self and enthroning Christ? How many? Perhaps not even one. And yet on these hours we are building character for eternity. Out of these hours is growing that immortal self with which at last we must stand before the judgment-seat of God. Twelve hours in the day to work out your salvation, and how many men are using these twelve hours in working out their perdition?

How, then, are we going to redeem our days, make the most of these twelve hours, so that at last no upbraiding memory shall recall them with sorrow and shame?

I would not be so foolish as to say that this power to use time aright means that we are to fill up each separate hour with some determined, conscious effort. That would be impossible, and even if it were possible, it would turn us into

self-conscious prigs and moral pedants. You cannot detach every hour, and say, as Franklin said in his diary, that this hour will be devoted to such and such a duty, that hour to some other duty, and so on. That would destroy a great deal of the inspiration of life, and would turn existence into a grinding machine. No, the hours are to be redeemed, not so much by what we do in them as by the spirit we bring to them, by the temper in which we use them. Let every day be begun with its season of special prayer. Let it have its moments shut off for communion with God. And then these moments, however brief, of consecrated prayer, will give a tone to the rest of the day which will make impossible that flippant dissipation of time which is so ruinous to character.

There are two things that this spirit of prayer will produce in our use of the twelve hours in the day. First, prayer produces a sense of urgency, — a spirit of haste, if you like, but not a spirit of hurry. It intensifies the thought that time is short and yet enough for each one of us to do something for God. It is that feeling of urgency in regard to each day as it comes that it should leave the record of something attempted, something given for God and our fellowmen, that gives richness to life, a beauty to character, a sunny radiance to the soul, that makes earth the threshold of heaven. Nothing is more disgusting than to meet people who simply loaf through life, with-

out any sense of urgency. As the saying goes, they do not care whether school keeps or not. They are not worried about the world's necessities. What we want is this sense of urgency. Time is short, and yet long enough with prayer to do something that will abide when we have passed away. That is the first thing that prayer brings to the twelve hours of the day.

The second thing is a sense of calmness, a spirit of serenity. How often we fret and worry beneath the pressure of life! The friction of care reduces the effectiveness of our energy. Many men are wearing themselves out before their time, simply because they have this hallucination that there is not time enough. They get into a fever of worry because the days are too short. But prayer brings to us the thought that God has given us time enough, and all He asks from us is to live and work by the day. In His service we are only day-laborers. With to-morrow we have nothing to do. The command is, "Go, work to-day," and the promise is, "I will pay you a penny a day." God's wages are paid, not by the month nor the week, but by the day. Each day brings its duty, but each day brings its grace and strength and blessing as well.

"Build a little fence of trust
Just around to-day,
Fill the space with loving work,
And therein stay.

Look not through the sheltering bars
Upon to-morrow;
God will help thee bear whatever comes
Of joy or sorrow."

With some of us the day of life is young. The morning still lends freshness to our youthful ardor. But with others of us it is already the eleventh hour, the eleventh hour in life's busy day. Although we know it not, the dusk time is falling fast. The twilight of our years is deepening, and high up in the belfry of the soul

"The curfew tolls the knell of passing day."

And yet through the silence of this eleventh hour, through the shadowed market-place of our life's activities, we may hear to-night the voice of infinite love and tenderness calling, and calling yet again, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" It is the eleventh hour, and Christ claims that eleventh hour. Redeem the time in His service. Consecrate it to His glory, and you will in no wise lose your reward. To-day, if ye will hear His voice — and remember, "there are twelve hours in the day."

IV

DOES IT PAY?

*What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and
forfeit his life? — MARK viii. 36 (R. V.).*

THE men to whom Christ addressed these words were proverbial at driving a hard bargain. The instinct of profit and loss was their ruling passion. The commercial standard in life dominated them. Whatever suggested the market price of anything, even of life itself, appealed to their immediate interest. When, therefore, our Saviour presents this question to them, "What doth it profit a man if He gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" He meets them on the plane of their ruling passion. To reach their conscience, He appeals to their commercial instincts. Deliberately He puts religion down on the one basis where, as nowhere else, they could appreciate it, and then says, "As a question of profit and loss, what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Put whatever premium you like on your little world, but, as business men, is that world worth quite as much as you are paying for it? Is it worth while to forfeit the best part of life here, as well as here-

after, for the mere getting of a temporary world?"

You may say, perhaps, that this was not the highest kind of appeal to make to a man's conscience. You may tell me that there is something sordid in associating the claims of the soul with anything so gross as a question of profit and loss. The motives which dominate character are surely higher than that. Yet it was the wisdom of Jesus in dealing with men that He always appealed to them along the line of their commonest interests. He adapted His message to the special aptitudes of the different people He met. Who can doubt, if He came to any of our great commercial centers to-day, that Christ would once more present this same question, "What does it profit you, O you commercial people, if you gain the whole world and forfeit your life?" I venture to say that there is no message in the teaching of Christ so timely or so practical to present-day needs as just that question. We are living in an age which is steeped in the commercial spirit. Commercialism has invaded every sphere of human activity. The professions, the arts, our social conditions, as well as our business enterprises, are tagged all over with the money label. The typical man of the hour is he who knows the intrinsic value of nothing, but can tell you the selling price of everything, from the conscience of a politician upwards. "What doth it profit a man?" has come to be the supreme

standard of success. "What is there in it for me?" is the test by which the average man to-day estimates the opportunities of life.

So our Saviour, in these words, appeals to the young manhood of America to-day, as He appealed to the men of His own time. What He says in effect to us is this: "Place your life, and all that that life of yours stands for, in the scale of values, and then, in the light of its spiritual capacities ask this question, each one for yourself, Is the surrender of that life of yours, with which God has endowed you, a fair exchange for any achievement or success, whether in the realm of wealth or fame or power? As a question of profit and loss, what does it profit any man if he gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"

Some of us are standing on the threshold of new opportunities and soon to enter upon the real business of life. I ask you then to consider with me for a few minutes one or two practical aspects of this question of Christ, as they apply to some conditions of life to-day. Does it pay to forfeit life in exchange for anything that this world can give us?

I. Let us begin with the lowest aspect of all, — think, first of all, of the claims of the physical life and ask ourselves this question, "Does it profit a man if he gain his world and forfeit his physical life?" Is the loss of bodily strength, physical vigor, nervous energy, and all the capacity for en-

joyment which these things bring, — is that loss sufficiently offset by the gain of a whole world? You may say, that is not a question for religion. I beg your pardon, it is very emphatically a question for religion. Nothing is more deplorable than the tendency to rule out physical manhood from religious concern, as though spiritual life were indifferent to such things. One of the lessons we are learning to-day from science is that no man lives in sections of his being. He lives a completed, rounded life in which one part of his nature profoundly influences another, and a low-toned spiritual life may be, and often is, due to a low-toned condition of physical life. Personally, I decline to regard the emaciated saint of the tenth century as the typical Christian for the twentieth century. God claims the consecration of the body as much as the consecration of the soul. “Know ye not,” says the Apostle, “that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.”

The other evening I counted over in my mind no fewer than thirteen men who within recent years had died under fifty-two years of age, literally from the pressure of overwork. These were all successful men, who had amassed in their time something more than a comfortable fortune. They were not licentious or drunkards, and not all of them were irreligious men; but in gaining

their little world, they had simply toiled and struggled for themselves, denied themselves hours of relaxation and rest. Late and soon they were at the daily grind of getting without spending, and, physically depleted, they died, not only in the prime of manhood, but in the summit of success, when, humanly speaking, there was everything to live for. They had gained a world, and had forfeited the only life which could enjoy it. At their funerals their pastors, I doubt not, remarked on the mysterious Providence which had cut short their days in the meridian of their maturity; but, as a matter of fact, there was no mysterious Providence about it. The men had died by their own acts, by the surrender of the righteous claims of their physical life in the struggle to gain a world. You might as well talk about the mysterious Providence of a suicide as speak of it in the case of any man who in gaining his world forfeits his physical life and energy in the attempt. Well, was it worth while? Does that bargain pay? Is money of so much matter to any man that he should make himself a suicide for that one end?

No, even on the lowest consideration, it does not pay any man to forfeit his physical life in the effort to gain a world which becomes a tyrant of unrest. Yet that is exactly what multitudes of people are doing to-day. Shrewd and keen in the petty bargains of commercial life, they are

fools in the bigger bargain they are making with death—surrendering everything for a prize which they may never have the capacity to enjoy. It is like the Roman general who, having taken certain prisoners of war, yielded finally to their appeal for mercy and gave them quarter, and then proceeded to starve them to death. “I promised you your lives,” he replied to their remonstrances, “but I promised not to find you meat.” It is a parable some of us will understand. The world promises us its prizes of success, and then not infrequently denies us the physical capacity to enjoy them. It is a bargain which does not pay.

II. Go a stage higher. There is the loss of intellectual life which many men pay for the world they gain. Some people die as the trees sometimes do, not from the root but from the top. The intellect begins to wither before the body. I do not mean that they become imbecile, but the absorption of their world is so insistent that the brain becomes simply a part of the machinery that grinds out the struggle for success. Thackeray, in his keen, sarcastic way, describes somewhere a young man who in his early years delighted a company by his brilliant conversation, witty repartee, and wide knowledge of literature and life. Twenty years later, Thackeray pictures that same man sitting silent and unresponsive at his dinner-table, and showing animation only when the quality of the wines and meats was discussed. He

had sacrificed his intellect to the satisfaction of his appetite.

We have all met or known such people, in whom every intellectual interest in life is apparently sacrificed to the pursuit of a material end. They can talk of nothing outside their daily routine. They are interested in nothing that does not directly concern their immediate purpose. They cannot feel the charm or fascination of intellectual genius. The great writers are sealed books to them. The inspiring themes which stimulate thought and enrich the mind are powerless to touch the man who has laid his intellectual life upon the altar of a sordid ambition.

Only the other day a well-known man told me that some years ago he had sent a copy of his first book, then just published, to a prominent master of finance, a man who from nothing had amassed a colossal fortune. Some time after my friend met this man, who, in congratulating the author, remarked that he should feel particularly flattered by the fact that he had read the book at all. "Why so," inquired my friend? "Because," replied the millionaire, "it is the only book of any kind I have read in five years!" Think of the mental condition of such a life; here was a man so drenched in the atmosphere of mere money-getting that every intellectual interest was paralyzed. Yet that very man was held up at his death, some time after, in a Young Men's Chris-

tian Association meeting as a fitting type for emulation of the self-made man, simply because he had amassed a fortune without apparently having robbed anybody in the process! The pity of all this is that so many young people to-day are growing up in this starved intellectual atmosphere. The mind is left to feed on cheap plays, cheap novels, and cheap amusements, so that we are losing the culture and charm of a more gracious age. Well, does it pay? Is this artificial and superficial life a sufficient recompense for the loss of that mental breadth which is the mark of true refinement? What shall it profit a people if in gaining a world of wealth it forfeits its intellectual life in the process?

III. But again, there is the moral side of life, which, in these latter days especially, has been ruthlessly sacrificed by so many on the altar of material success. This past year in American public life will be memorable in our history as a year of reappreciated ideals. Principles that for a generation and more have been at a discount have become re-enhanced in value, and their supreme place in national prestige and honor recognized. It has been, in truth, a year of a great ethical revival, and men who not so long ago sneered at such things have been compelled to acknowledge the sovereign authority of conscience asserted by the voice of the common people. It is not too much to say that the revelations of these past

months, following one after another in almost every branch of commercial and industrial enterprise, shocking as they have been to the moral sense of the community, have nevertheless cleansed the moral atmosphere, so that the young man of to-day enters upon his public career in a more wholesome environment than at any time in the past twenty-five years.

But — and this is the pity of it all — the records of these months, involving the downfall of so many men high up in public estimation, have revealed, as with flaming fingers, how possible it is in these days to secure reputation and wealth and influence at the expense of integrity and honor. The enthronement of success has been purchased through the degradation of conscience. In the fierce struggle for wealth men have deliberately trampled on their principles, and in gaining a world they have forfeited their moral ideals. Well, does it pay? Even were there no disclosures here, had there been no awakening of the public conscience, yet at the final adjustment of things, when human society stands in the white light of the eternal judgment throne, will any man be satisfied with a bargain which, in giving him a sordid world of luxury and wealth, has stripped him of every claim to honor and integrity? Were there no higher sanctions than the eternal standards of morality to guide us, surely it is better to be true than be false, better to be pure than to

be licentious, better to be brave than cowardly. What doth it profit a man if he gain a whole world and lose his moral life?

IV. But I pass on to the deepest loss of all, to the loss of that spiritual life compared to which these other losses are incidental. My only difficulty here is to make clear the reality of spiritual loss. While most men can appreciate the loss of physical strength in the pursuit of the world, and while some men can understand the loss of intellectual life in the same way, not many men care much about the loss of spiritual life, for the very simple reason that it is a loss of which they are absolutely unconscious. For the man whose spiritual life is undeveloped, the loss of the soul counts very little. Why should he care about it when he has never known what a soul is — when its infinite possibilities, its unending destiny, are a sealed book to him? That is the difficulty. How can we make it clear to ourselves that the pursuit of the world at the price of a soul entails a penalty which eternity itself cannot revoke?

I can only put that question, as our Saviour does, on a purely business basis. Here is the possibility of eternal life within your soul, — a distinct faculty which you possess, which, when physical death intervenes, will survive that collapse. But that faculty within you needs to be nourished and fed and exercised just as much as your physical or intellectual life needs to be fed

and nourished and exercised. Starve that spiritual life within you, and what remains for eternity? The result simply means that we must die spiritually as well as physically, and the question again is, "Does it pay?" What shall it profit a man if he gain his little world and forfeit his eternal life?

There is nothing arbitrary about this penalty. It is not God's punishment or God's wrath. It is simply the result of a law as simple and as irrevocable as any law which governs our physical existence. You can chase the world so persistently that you will destroy your physical life, and you can chase that same world so intently that you will destroy your spiritual life. The one thing is not more certain than the other. Therefore Christ puts the question, "Does it pay? Is it worth while? What profit is there in it at the final adjustment of things, when the great balance sheet of life is made up?"

But some one may ask at this point, Is it not possible for a man to achieve both things, — to gain the world and save his soul? I do not deny it. There have been, as there are to-day, men who have made worldly success a minister of spiritual service. They have gained their earthly ambition without the surrender of their spiritual ideal. All honor to such men, men like William E. Gladstone in England or William E. Dodge in New York, who have revealed the possibility

of consecrating the highest success to the service of the deepest faith. It ought not to be impossible for any man to do that, — to make material success a means of grace, so that in gaining his world he brings that world to the feet of Christ. That, I should think, was the highest kind of life; and though we are apt to sneer at people who try to make the best of both worlds, I see no reason why any man should not strive by God's grace to attain the highest success here, so that through that success he may do God and humanity the widest service. The pity is that such men are a tragic minority. Most of us lack the poise of character, the balance of soul, that can keep in perfect harmony the claims of two worlds. Yet it is only a question of proper emphasis. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," said Christ, "and all these other things shall be added unto you." Success is a bi-product of life, but it is not necessarily a value to be despised or rejected.

At the very moment that Christ asked this question there was a man then living who at fifty-six years of age had gained the world. It was the Roman emperor Tiberius, the most powerful of all men living, the absolute ruler of the fairest and richest territories of the earth. There was no control to his authority, no limit to his wealth, and no restraint upon his pleasure. Until fifty-six years of age he had been a man of noble qualities, a distinguished orator, and a brave sol-

dier; but when he gained his world he surrendered everything to sensual pleasure. On one of the beautiful islands in the Bay of Naples he had built a summer palace where everything that could minister to voluptuous ease and self-gratification had been brought to perfection. And yet it was from that same palace of luxury that he wrote his famous message to the Senate after they had deified him, investing him with the qualities of a god: "What to write you, Conscript Fathers, or how to write, or what not to write, may all the gods and goddesses destroy me worse than I feel they are destroying me every day, if I know!" As Pliny says of him, he was, by the common consent of all men, the saddest of all men. He had gained his world, but he had forfeited his soul.

What, then, shall we do to save this faculty of immortal life within us? As a question of profit and loss, the soul of every man is worth saving. How are you going to save it? I reply, simply by giving it a chance to live. Give your soul a chance to live. Give it atmosphere, so that it can breathe; and remember that prayer is the atmosphere of the soul. The day that prayer dies in a man's soul he commits spiritual suicide. Give it room, so that it can expand; and remember that service for God and your fellowmen will expand the narrowest soul. Give something more than a brief hour a week to the needs of your

spiritual life. Dwell more in God and less in self. Feed your soul day by day, yes, and hour by hour, with the thought of Jesus Christ. At the last you will thank God for doing by His grace, through a little self-denial here, that which will crown your life hereafter with immortal blessing.

V.

PETER FOLLOWED AFAR OFF

But Peter followed Him afar off, unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants to see the end. — MATTHEW xxvi. 58.

THE Last Supper was over, the farewell hymn had been sung, and the sad procession of Master and disciples had passed out through the city gates to Gethsemane. There alone, in His great agony and prostrate on the ground, our Saviour had poured out His soul in one last cry of submission. No human eye had witnessed the anguish of that hour. Those whom he had asked to share His lonely vigil had slumbered and slept. James and John, who had desired to drink of the very cup He would drink that they might share His glory, had faltered now; and Peter — the brave, impulsive Peter, who an hour or two previous had promised to lay down his life for his Master — he too in this solemn preparation hour had failed to obey the dying command, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

But all this was over now. The sacred opportunity of sharing the Master's sorrow was gone not to return. The angel host which came down

from heaven with its message of strength was unfelt by the slumbering disciples. When at last they did awake, it was no angelic vision that met their affrighted gaze, but the gleam of torches seen through the trees, and what they heard was the measured tramp of armed men led by the traitor Judas and commissioned to arrest their Master. Then it was that He who had passed through the preparation hour in earnest, agonizing prayer met the rebel band with a calmness that awed and dismayed, whilst they who had passed through the same period in heedless slumber could only gather around in affrighted amazement, not knowing what to do. The attitude of the Master they could not understand, and when at last they saw Him led away without a murmur, the victim of vilest treachery, all they could do was to seize their one opportunity of escape, and so we are told "They all forsook Him and fled," but Peter, in the words of the text, — "Peter followed afar off."

The words of the Bible, we remember at the outset, are not like those of any other book; its sentences do not end with the occasion which called them forth. On the contrary, every verse of Scripture, especially those pertaining to the life of our Lord, contains some deep principle bearing on human life. It is so with these words before us; and bearing this in mind, we may profit somewhat as we follow Peter on that bitter night in

his experience, when for the first, and shall we not say for the last, time in life he followed Christ "afar off."

Our text gathers up the story of a moral decadence. It may be compared to a chain in which there are three links: first, the motives of Peter in following Jesus at this time; second, the kind of following which these motives inspired; and third, the moral catastrophe or tragedy which that following in its turn produced. These are the links in the chain.

I. As to the motives. Our first feeling in reading the text is one of at least qualified admiration for Peter. "Well," we say, "Peter was not quite so bad as the rest of the disciples. He at least did not forsake his Master and flee; he still followed!" And this, I doubt not, was Peter's own feeling that night, when not too boldly he kept his eye on that torchlit company and with cautious footsteps followed it back to Jerusalem. But a little reflection, as well as a knowledge of the whole story, speedily reminds us how false, how superficial, is this first admiration. After all, we come to see that this supposed discipleship on the night of the betrayal rests altogether on appearances, and appearances, we do not need to be told, are of all things the most deceptive in the Christian life. I wonder how many of us, to all outward appearance professing disciples of Jesus Christ, are yet as unworthy of the name as Peter

was when he followed "afar off." No, we must get down into Peter's inmost heart and character to discover the real motive which inspired this seeming fidelity to the cause of Christ. And first and pre-eminently I remark that Peter was actuated by the motive of pride. Pride, we know, was the besetting weakness of Peter's unregenerate life, as in a certain sense, no doubt, it was the source of much of his impulsive force of character. I say the source of much of his impulsive force of character, because the feelings and the temperament which beget pride are not necessarily base in themselves. It is a certain nobleness which spurs a man on to action rather than bear the suspicion of being thought a coward or craven. But in Peter's case this pride, which showed him so often to be physically the bravest of men, revealed him many a time in the moral sphere to be the weakest of the weak. No doubt it is a truism in human experience, but of which the very frequency makes it the more tragic, that the stuff which makes a man brave in human judgment reveals him a coward and a craven in the fires of moral struggle. The soldier who on the field of battle never flinched in the face of death itself dies not seldom in a pothouse, the helpless, unresisting victim of the lowest sensual appetites. Faith in self makes a man physically brave, but it is only faith in God that creates the moral hero. And this was the lesson Peter had to learn in his

unregenerate life. Again and again we see him stumbling over it, as we have seen a schoolboy stumble over his Euclid or Latin grammar. We look back to the midnight storm on the lake, and see him with great self-assurance cast himself into the boiling surf, and then the next instant hear him cry out in an ecstasy of terror, "Lord, save me or I perish!" Or, again, turn to the upper room. Who is it will not let the Master wash his feet? Peter. Who is it, though all men be offended in the Christ, yet will not he? Peter. Who is it with loud, resolute voice protests he will lay down his life for the Master? It is Peter, and we may be assured these loud-spoken boasts Peter had not forgotten now as he stole softly after the traitor's mob. His character was at stake. He had promised much for the Master, nothing less than life itself. These promises proclaimed so loudly in presence of the disciples must be fulfilled somehow. Liar and coward was the alternative if he failed, so pride whispered in Peter's heart. And thus it was not the bent and wearied form of Jesus, of whom in the torches' glare he must have caught glimpses ever and again, but it was the thought of self, the ambition to redeem his character from the charge of infidelity, to win merit for his courage, that lent courage to his feet. If the rest fled, not so he. He still followed, but followed "afar off," urged by the motive of pride.

Beside this motive of pride there was a certain element of prudence in Peter's following Jesus "afar off." Woven into the texture of all our pride, you will always find the more sober thread of prudence, and so with Peter now. He followed afar off because it was a prudent thing to do. In the Garden Jesus had spoken about twelve legions of angels; throughout His life, again and again, Peter had witnessed the exercise of supreme almighty power. Was it not possible then that even now in this eleventh hour Jesus might summon that angelic host and put to flight this angry mob? Then surely he would receive the best reward and highest meed of praise who followed when the rest had scattered and fled. It was prudent, O Peter, to follow the Master afar off.

I know to some this may seem a hard view to take of Peter, but, I ask, is it unjust? On calm consideration is it unjust, in the light of what took place an hour or two after, when we remember the threefold denial emphasized with an oath and curse? Surely only the most selfish motives could have held sway in Peter's heart that night, when he followed his forsaken Master afar off. Notice, further, that what we are trying to estimate just now is not Peter's character, but Peter's motives. Character may indeed be influenced by motive, but we must not on that account confound motive with character. You in

trade and business to-morrow may be impelled by some sordid motives to do that against which at another time your whole character would rise up in condemnation. Just as there are times in our prayers and aspirations when we are really better than ourselves, so in our passions and lusts there come moments when we are worse than ourselves. So I think it was with Peter; and thus judging him for the moment by the motives of the moment, only a selfish pride or even more selfish prudence could have animated this far-off following.

Now, what meaning has this for us? Are our motives in our Christian life any purer, less selfish, than these I have named in the case of Peter? Pride, prudence, — in how many a self-called Christian life are not these still the predominating motives? How many of us follow, or at least profess to follow, Christ, not for an hour or two in a single night, but all life through, animated by motives just as unworthy? Is it not the case, under present conditions of society, that many a man knows that his very hope of livelihood depends upon his making a religious profession of some kind? and a religious profession of some kind he accordingly makes. Many a woman knows that her good name with her neighbors depends upon her attending church with at least decent regularity, — and decent regularity does not, as a rule, include afternoon service; God's house is attended. No, I will make bold to say

that before God a man is more honest who from conviction denies all faith than he who from selfish motives makes profession of a fashionable Christianity. It is not love to the Saviour, it is out of no deep sense of what He has done for us and claims us to be through Him, but it is self, — how to keep intact one's own good name, how to win merit and public applause, how to assure for ourselves the promise of eternal selfishness. These are the things that lie at the root of much of our present-day religious life. Like Peter, motives unworthy and selfish inspire our discipleship, and like Peter we follow the Master afar off.

II. The second link in the chain is the kind of following which these motives inspired. Briefly but significantly our text describes it as "afar off." And just for a moment let us try, if we can, to picture the scene which these words suggest. It is night. Eastward the first streaks of day are breaking furtively. Yonder, wrapped in a curtain of gloom, lies the sleeping city, with here and there a twinkling of light marking what may be a sick-chamber or two. Like a thin gray line, the road from Gethsemane stretches wearily across the hill. At once the eye rests on the torch-lit band of soldiers as they press their weary prisoner forward, and then, far down the road, the attention is caught by something else. What is this crouching figure of a man, ever with his eye on the guard? He pauses when they pause,

advances cautiously when they proceed. Who is this far-off wayfarer following with ghostly steps? It is Peter, the brave, the fearless Peter, who for three years and more had stood at his Saviour's side and shared His sympathy; now in the hour of his Master's need he follows afar off.

At once we feel that such following lacks three distinctive elements of Christian discipleship. First, it lacks sympathy. There are few of us who do not know the power of sympathy. There are sorrows indeed in every life which cannot be told even to the nearest friend, trials for which there is no human utterance. These come at some moment or other to all of us; and yet in such hours of darkness what, next to the Divine pity, is better than the sympathy of a friend, — to feel that one heart beats in touch with yours, that another shares although it cannot explain your sorrow! The ministry of sympathy, that is what these disciples had from Jesus these three years or more; and now, in this night of suffering, bearing in his heart such sorrow as the world has not seen before or since, who does not feel that the human heart of Jesus would have been lightened somewhat at least by the presence and sympathy of one disciple? Yet what was the case? One disciple had betrayed Him with a kiss, and another followed afar off, soon to deny whom before he had confessed.

But there was more than that. It lacked en-

thusiasm. I suppose we have all had enough experience of the world to know it is never so cruel as to the man who is utterly forsaken. Let the world get the idea that no one believes in you, that you are completely down and forsaken, and you feel the full force of its tyranny and persecution. On the other hand, if in your trouble even one true enthusiastic follower stands by your side ready to defend by word and action, then at once and inevitably you will receive at least some measure of respect. And this was our Lord's experience. For three years these Scribes and Pharisees had seen Him surrounded and followed by a compact, enthusiastic band of men unbroken in their allegiance; but now, when active enthusiastic service was needed so much, where were they? They were scattered every man to his own. Alone, upborne by the enthusiasm of not one of the twelve, our Saviour bore His suffering, and that suffering we may be sure lost none of its intensity and anguish by the fact that no word of enthusiastic faith was uttered in His defense.

There were, then, two things lacking in Peter's discipleship that night, — sympathy and enthusiasm, — but there was more. This far-off following lacked that which surely is the crowning mark of the true disciple, without which indeed discipleship is a mockery and a shame. It lacked self-sacrifice. I can well believe that had Peter that night followed Jesus back to Jerusalem step

by step and side by side, then upon the next morning we should have seen Calvary crowned, not with three, but with four crosses. Peter would have paid for his fidelity with his life, and this doubtless Peter knew. To him as yet the cross was the symbol of infamy and shame. Not yet had gathered round it that Shekinah of later glory which has transfigured the cross into a throne. Meantime the death of crucifixion was the death of the criminal and the outcast, and the respectable Peter dared not face such an ordeal as that. He at least was no criminal, and so he followed afar off. It was not until afterward that Peter learned what he had missed that night, — learned that to suffer with Christ was the highest glory man could know. That knowledge came after, and we are told that when at last Peter's martyrdom had come, when he was about to be lifted upon his cross, he asked that he might be crucified head downward with face to the earth, because, he said, he was not worthy to die as his Master had. Is there not meaning here for us? Into our lives, into your life and mine, such moments of opportunity come, moments of sacrifice, — times when we are asked to suffer for Christ, to give up that for His sake which to us may be dearer than life itself. How shall we realize such moments? How shall we prove ourselves true to the Master we serve? Not, certainly, if we follow afar off. We cannot claim the sacrifices of life and know

the joy and triumph of Christian suffering unless we are walking close to Christ, His hand of grace in ours. That only makes sacrifice possible, that alone can gain the martyr's crown. Nearness to Christ, — is that not the peculiar need of Christian life to-day? Why is it the heroic element is so lacking in the Christian life to-day? Why is it that names like those of Father Damien and Sister Dora are names in a thousand? Why, but because too often the Christian disciple sees his Master afar off. "The golden moments in the stream of life rush past us, and we see nothing but sand; the angels come to visit us, and we only know them when they are gone."

III. The last link in the chain is the moral tragedy which this following produced. By and by Peter's lagging footsteps brought him to the high priest's palace. The morning was cold, and Peter was cold too after his not too rapid morning walk. A bright fire was burning in the servants' hall, and here Peter hastened to warm himself. We can easily imagine what was the subject of gossip that morning. It would be full of the prisoner who had just been brought in, and we may be assured there would be no slander too cruel that would not be spoken about Jesus. And Peter, standing there, hears it all, and neither by look, word, nor gesture seeks to defend his slandered Master. That was the first step in this final scene. Listening to bad words soon leads

to speaking bad words, — that is a common experience. The boy in the office or workshop who hears the oath fall from his senior's lips soon learns to repeat the oath for himself. That was Peter's experience now, though he was no stripling. As he stood there with the dancing firelight playing over his coward face, the quick eyes of a maiden see him. "Why," she says, "thou also wast one of them!" and he denies it. "I know not the man," he says. Again the accusation is repeated by another maid; and again he denies it, but now with an oath and a curse. The rude, untutored nature of the man bursts forth afresh, and he denies with oaths and curses; and then it is, as Peter stands there in the gray morning light, burning with passion, hurling oaths and curses in the teeth of his accusers, calling heaven to witness that he knew not the man, denying his Lord with a greater vehemence than ever he had confessed Him, suddenly, shrill and clear in the crisp morning air, the note of the cock crow is heard. It falls only on the ear of Peter. The same instant through the open door of the court the face of Jesus, wistful and solemn, as he passes forth, looks on Peter. Again the cock crow is heard, and then with a great sob on his lips Peter staggers out into the fresh spring morning, realizing that he has denied his Lord. This was the end. The chain was complete, the unworthy motive had passed into the selfish following, and

now the selfish following was crowned with open ruin. Oh, picture of many a ruined life! So, day by day, men are passing down into moral death. No man makes shipwreck of his life in a moment. No man makes one swift plunge into the abyss of open shame. He has prepared the way himself beforehand. The secret thought cherished in the heart passes forth into evil habit. Evil habit at last stands forth in the ruined life. Sow your sin to-day heedlessly, thoughtlessly in the morning of your life, and reap your habit to-morrow. Sow your habit to-day and reap your character to all eternity. Oh, let those of us who are trifling with secret sin of any kind see in Peter's anguish that which in an infinitely more tragic sense may yet be true of us. Every day's indulgence is a step nearer the end, and for some of you that end is not far off.

I have said this was Peter's end, and yet was this indeed the end? Peter went out and wept bitterly, and a few hours after we know that another disciple also went out with remorse upon his soul, but went out not to return, to die the suicide's death. Yet it was not so with Peter. Not many days had passed ere once again Peter was sitting at the feet of Jesus and once more the voice of Jesus was speaking, "Peter, lovest thou me?" and the answer came, truer than ever before, "Master, thou knowest I love thee!" What was it saved Peter but did not save Judas? Was

it that God could forgive the one but not the other, — that Peter's sin was less heinous than that of Judas? Let us not suppose so for a moment. Peter believed when Judas doubted. Peter rested on the forgiving love of Jesus, and resting there he found salvation. Judas doubted that love and pity, and doubting he condemned himself. What have we been doing? Are we resting on the forgiving love of the Saviour? To-day we have denied His name and betrayed His cause, yet to-day that love and forgiveness plead with us to return. "Lovest thou me?" is the Master's question to each one of us, irrespective of the past and its burden of guilt and sin. What shall our answer be? Shall we not yield to His claim, shall we not make that complete surrender which shall bring us close to His side and make us strong in His grace? For that He pleads from all of us, the weakest and the most worthless; and then for the future we need fear no evil, for the Saviour's voice calls, as of old, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

VI

A MAN'S RELIGION AND HIS BUSINESS

Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God. — I CORINTHIANS vii. 24.

WHAT is the precise relation between a man's religion and his business? In what way and to what extent should his faith in God influence his conduct in commerce? That ought to be a simple question, easily answered by Christian people; and yet, whatever theories we may have, practically, for the average man, it is a question beset with difficulty.

To begin with, there is the fact that so many of us live in detached sections of our being. We segregate our lives into so many separated compartments of activity, one labelled "Business," another, "Pleasure," and a third, "Religion," with the tag added, "For occasional use on Sundays." That, of course, is no way to live; it means a dissipated influence; but so far as religion is concerned, it is the way most of us are content to live. Summer is coming on — or at least we hope it is — and in a few weeks thousands of professing Christians will put away their religion in spiritual camphor as methodically as

they put away their winter furs till the fall. Unconsciously we treat our religion as something apart from life, — as a dead investment, so to speak, which we are not willing to part with, but which we regard more as a Sunday liability than as a week-day asset. That being so, what possible influence, except of the most incidental nature, can a man's religion have upon his business concerns? If he regards his religion as simply a Sunday proprietary article, he is using it on the one day in the week in which he needs it the least. If there is one day in the seven that a business man can get along without his religion, surely it is on that day, when the busy wheels of commerce are stopped and a certain religious atmosphere prevails. And yet, for so many of us, Sunday is the only day that religion plays any part at all on the stage of thought. All this simply means that we have lost grip of the practical end of religion. We have come to think that the essence of religion is belief, whereas it is conduct. Belief is a means, but conduct, as the attestation of character, is the end of all vital religion. "What doth the Lord require of thee," asks Micah, in words of immortal significance, "but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

There is still another practical difficulty in the way of making our religion a definite and dominant influence in business life. That springs from the fact, lamentable though it is, that the man

who parades or obtrudes his religious views in business transactions is not always an entirely trustworthy person. The unction of his speech does not quite deodorize the unsavoriness of some of his commercial dealings. Only a few weeks ago a prominent and entirely reputable banker in this city issued to the public a series of warnings against certain types of men active in Wall Street, and amongst these, starred with suspicion, he included "the man who talks religion in business hours." That is surely a tragic condition, but the pity of it is that the grounds for this distrust are only too common. With quite appalling frequency the embezzlers and defaulters are men whose professions of religion were part of their stock in trade. You cannot wonder, therefore, that to the man on the street religion and business make an unsavory mixture, and the popular mind resents the attempt to combine them. If, for example, an active church-worker in your employment habitually comes late to his desk, and pleads as an excuse the claims of his church engagements, you are entirely justified, whether you are a Christian or not yourself, in demanding either his resignation from your employment or the surrender of his church duties. The first demand of religion is not piety, but integrity. The employer proves the sincerity of his religion in his business activities, not by inquiring about the state of his employees' souls, but by paying them fair wages,

by dealing with them squarely, and with his customers or clients honestly. On the contrary, the employee tests the reality of his religion in business hours, not by running round religious meetings, but by doing a straight and honest day's work for those who have employed him. When common morality in the ordinary relations of business life, between tradesman and customer, lawyer and client, physician and patient, employer and employee, is made a controlling principle, the fair fame and name of religion will not suffer. It is the unfortunate and too frequent separation of morality from religion that is the cause of this widespread suspicion towards the latter in the mind of the average man.

This fact is strikingly brought out in one of Mr. Gladstone's letters to the Duchess of Sutherland, quoted by Mr. Morley in his biography of the statesman. "There is one proposition," says Mr. Gladstone, "which the experience of life burns into my soul; it is this, that a man should beware of *letting his religion spoil his morality*. In a thousand ways, some great, some small, but all subtle, we are daily tempted to that great sin." (Gladstone's Life, vol. ii. p. 185.) What did Gladstone mean by that? He immediately adds, for he was an intensely religious man himself: "To speak of such a thing seems dishonoring to God; but it is not religion as it comes from Him, it is religion with the strange and evil mixtures

which it gathers from dwelling in us." And that is the heart of the trouble. A religion which concerns itself chiefly with ritual or creed or form, which separates itself from life by insisting on exclusive privileges for itself and its votaries, which is formal and official instead of being real and vital, imperils the foundations of common morality. So long as we are content to treat our religion in that way, its place in the practical concerns of life will inevitably be that of an interloper, intruding and interfering where it does not belong. There was, indeed, much truth and homely wisdom in the advice which young David Livingstone received from his grandfather when he left Blantyre for the old College at Glasgow: "Dauvit, Dauvit, make your religion an every-day business of your life, and not a thing of fits and starts."

Let me, then, indicate what seems to be the true and vital influence of religion on business life in three practical propositions:

I. Every business creates certain specific temptations of its own; and it is the business of your religion to resist these temptations.

II. Every business develops certain definite qualities, talents, and capacities along its own special lines; and it is the business of your religion to sanctify these talents and capacities.

III. Every business opens up certain opportunities of helpfulness and service for God and

man; and it is the business of your religion to teach you how to realize these things for the glory of God and the benefit of your fellowmen.

I. *Every business creates its own specific temptations.* Dr. Watkinson tells us that some years ago two scientists of Vienna made a series of bacteriological experiments on a number of bank-notes which had been in circulation for some time. The result of their researches was sufficiently startling. On each bank-note they discovered the presence of 19,000 microbes of disease, — some of tuberculosis, some of diphtheria, and some of erysipelas. More than that, they found one bacillus peculiar to the bank-note, — the bank-note microbe, so to speak, because it is found nowhere else. It thrives and fattens and multiplies on the peculiar paper of which a bank-note is made.

Well, is there not a parable here for all of us? If some business men here this morning could realize quite clearly the quantity and quality of some of the microbes existing at this moment on the bills in their pocket-books, one fancies that a retiring collection would be needed to transfer the infected paper to a less dangerous zone, — as, for example, Foreign Missions!

But there is a moral as well as a physical microbe in our business lives. No sane man is going to get out of business because of that fact, but every intelligent man should be aware of the special peril to his soul which his daily round of duty

creates. The temptations of professional life are different from those of a purely commercial life. A lawyer's temptations differ from those of a physician, and both are distinct from those of a clergyman. A banker has to face moral perils of which a tradesman knows nothing, and the artisan or laborer meets his special temptations in an altogether different sphere. A lawyer, for example, finds his peculiar line of temptation in the tendency to treat lightly, in the interests of his client, the exact claims of truth. The delicacy of his conscience is constantly imperilled in the prevalence of chicanery and double dealing. In medicine the specific temptation is largely involved in the confidential relations which of necessity exist between physician and patient. In the ministry one frequent source of temptation lies in the peril of exaggerated statement, — in the preacher's describing certain spiritual experiences or inculcating certain ecclesiastical dogmas which have no basis of reality in his own experience. Insincerity is the result. In commercial life the avenues of temptation open up in a hundred different directions from the passion of avarice. In the struggle to accumulate wealth quickly, selfishness, unprincipled speculation, dishonest competition, meanness, and dishonor, all lay their traps for the unwary soul.

Here, then, religion finds its place. My religion is worthless unless through daily prayer and

watchfulness it enables me to resist and overcome these special forms of temptation which the environment of my business life creates. As Jonathan Edwards once said, "The grace of God can exist where you or I cannot." It is gloriously true; the grace of God makes Christians anywhere. It lifts a man above the tyranny of circumstance and liberates him from the pressure of environment. That was what Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians in our text. Some of them were slaves; some were at work in heathen employments. They had to do things for a day's wage which their enlightened souls abhorred. "Nevertheless," says the Apostle, "let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God."

How many of us are making our religion (which is simply our faith in God expressing itself in daily prayer) such a definite influence of resistance against the temptations incidental to business life? Surely there would be fewer collapses in character and reputation in the commercial world if with resolute purpose every business man in New York made it the daily business of his religion to fortify his soul at those strategic points where the insidious forces of sin invade the citadel of conscience. A faith which can prove its vitality in this way will not simply disarm the criticism of the world, but vindicate its supreme necessity in practical concerns.

II. *Every business develops certain specific capacities along its own line of activity, and it is the business of religion to sanctify these qualities.* There is, for example, the shrewdness of the lawyer, the skill of the physician, the judgment of the financier, the enterprise of the merchant, the keenness of the broker, and so on, each of which is, in some respects at least, distinctive and characteristic. And yet, very largely, as we know, these qualities are developed through business experience. It is, indeed, wonderful how frequently a commercial or professional career calls out qualities in a man which up to that time no one suspected. You have seen a raw lad in college begin the study of law or medicine apparently hopelessly unfitted for any ultimate success. His comrades laugh at his awkwardness and deride his ambitions. And yet, a few years later, that raw lad, polished in the schools, refined through contact with life, wins his great success. He becomes a leader in his profession. As new forces play upon him, as new surroundings touch him, and new demands call out his slumbering powers, the man's energies are aroused. The latent possibilities of his nature realize themselves, and he finds his place in the world.

The same thing is constantly seen in commercial life. The uncouth country lad, with his "store" clothes and awkward manners, takes his seat at the city desk, and he is the butt for many a gibe

and joke from his more opulent associates. Look at him as he sits there with his heavy head over his ledger, and you would say he was condemned to a lifelong servitude at the desk. But no; the reserves of that lad's nature slowly unmask themselves. The integrity of his character wins respect; the capacity for hard work lifts him above his less strenuous companions, until, as the years go by, shrewd, keen, masterful, he too stands at the head of the great corporation. Talents have revealed themselves in his career whose force the struggle of the years has only served to strengthen.

Yet here is the danger. The peril for such a man is to become self-assertive, self-satisfied, and self-opinionated, because he feels himself self-made. A certain intolerance hardens his sympathy and makes him forgetful of the higher things of life. Nothing, indeed, is sadder than what I may call the "hardness" of success. Success sometimes coarsens a man; more often it hardens him, and in hardening him it contracts the higher life of his being. It is here, then, that religion once more finds its place in business life. Religion does not begrudge a man the highest success, but if it is an influence in his life, it sweetens success. It adds a certain grace of humility to the strongest character. It leaves room for the play of gentler qualities, so that while a man attains the highest position, he still remem-

bers with sympathy those who are struggling at the foot.

Here is what the commercial life of our city needs so much. Our unsanctified wealth vulgarizes character. Our materialism destroys the finer graces of the soul. Our men of influence, great in ability, unequalled in judgment and enterprise, unquestioned in integrity, are yet too often coarse in fiber, so that the veneer of an outward refinement conceals but poorly a certain vulgarity in thought and speech. When our religion can grip success, and baptize the qualities that go to make success possible with a spirit of Christlike humility and purity, the world will acknowledge the unquestioned place of religion in business life.

III. *Every business brings with it certain opportunities of helpfulness and service, and it is the business of our religion to teach us how to realize these opportunities for God and our fellowmen.* After all, our religion has no higher task than to show us how to leave this world a little bit better than we found it. Certainly religion has no more Christlike service than to teach us how to sweeten life for those to whom sin or sorrow, suffering or disappointment, has embittered it. It is a terrible record for any business man to leave behind him, that he passed through the world without ever having stretched out a helping hand to some struggling soul, or imparted some gift

of intelligent self-sacrifice to some worthy cause. The shame of it! — that so many business men in New York to-day will spend in a single night on a club dinner or social function more than they give in a whole year to charity. It is that kind of selfishness that feeds the fires of anarchy and inflames the passion of discontent. Yet such opportunities of helpfulness come to every business man every day. Religion gives us eyes to see them, and hearts and hands willing to realize them. That, I repeat, is the highest function of religion in business life, that it makes business, not a mere arena for winning material success, but a vantage ground for helpfulness and service. One of you, perhaps, discharged a clerk last week. He was flagrantly, culpably negligent and inefficient; you were justified in your action. But have you ever given a thought to him since then, “down and out” as he is to-day? Have you thought of the wife and children whom his dismissal renders destitute? Has your religion suggested to you that a word of advice from you at this crisis may mean lifelong amendment for him? Is your religion strong enough to send you where he lives some evening and do something that will make the future a little brighter for his helpless family? “A thankless task,” you say; “a useless errand.” Very true, but God is content to do many thankless things in your life and mine if so be He can bring us to Himself at last.

In such ways and by such acts of Christlike sympathy religion finds her place along the great thronging avenues of commercial life. So recognized, her place in that vast multitude of teeming interests will never be questioned, when by her silent influence day by day she teaches every man, "wherein he is called, therein to abide with God."

VII

HABIT

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. — JEREMIAH xiii. 23.

I AM going to begin my remarks to-night by reading parts of two letters written by a man of brilliant genius, a poet and philosopher, and one of the most fascinating conversationalists that ever lived. Perhaps no man ever had so large a circle of devoted friends. Yet these two letters were written asking help from two of his friends in the extremity of misery to which a certain habit had at last reduced him. For years he had tried to hide his sin, till concealment was impossible. The brain power was giving way beneath the seductive indulgence. Poverty and ruin were staring him in the face, and it was from the dark dungeon of habit that these letters were written.

The first letter reads: "For ten years the anguish of my spirit has been inexpressible, but the consciousness of my guilt has been worse. I have prayed for deliverance with drops of agony on

my brow, trembling not only before the justice of my God, but even before the mercy of my Redeemer. You bid me rouse myself. Better go and bid a man paralyzed in both arms to rub them together and it will cure him. You have no conception of the dreadful hell of my mind and conscience and body. You bid me pray! Oh, I do pray — to be able to pray.”

The other letter reads: “Conceive a spirit in hell employed in tracing out to others the way to that heaven from which his own sin excludes him. Conceive, in short, whatever is most wretched, helpless, and hopeless, and you will form a dim idea of my state. Ingratitude to my Maker; injustice, unnatural cruelty to my wife and children; self-condemned for my repeated broken promises — nay, too often actual falsehoods: these are some of the fruits of my sin.”

So wrote the mightiest, most gifted, most richly stored intellect of his day, scarcely equalled in any time. In the first of these letters he asks that his friends would confine him in a madhouse, where he might be restrained from the ravages of his habit. In the second letter he begs for a hundred and fifty dollars to keep body and soul together. Such was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who in the early prime of his manhood had become the victim of the laudanum habit. At the moment these letters were written he was consuming three quarts of the drug a week. In one dreadful twenty-four

hours he had even drank a quart of this deadly poison; yet so inured had his system become to it that instead of killing him it induced only a kind of chronic convulsion. Yet the mercy of God saved that man. The prayers which in his own words were offered with drops of agony, found an answer. A stranger hearing of his case opened his home to Coleridge, and for nineteen years the poet-philosopher found in that home a shelter. By constant care and watchfulness he was gradually broken from the soul-destroying habit, and it was during that period that he wrote his "Aids to Reflection," one of the most wonderful compendiums of profound thought in literature. I have sometimes thought that that work was an answer to the evening prayer which about this time he prepared: "O God, who alone knowest the heart of man, if the thought and purpose of my heart be upright before Thee, vouchsafe even yet in Thy mercy, in this my decay of life, an interval of strength; if so, Thy grace assisting me, I may make some compensation for the wasted talents Thou hast entrusted to me and the neglected opportunities which Thy loving kindness had provided. Let me be found a laborer in Thy vineyard, though of the late hour, when the Lord Himself calleth for His servant." You remember, too, the epitaph which Coleridge composed for his grave, and which perhaps sums up this pathetic side of his life:

“Stop, Christian passer by; stop, child of God,
And read with gentle breast! Beneath this sod
A poet lies, or that which seemed to be.
O lift a thought in prayer for S. T. C.
That he who many a year with toil of breath
Found death in life, may here find life in death.”

There are multitudes of men and women around us in this great city who in different forms are repeating the story of Coleridge's agony. What laudanum did for him, drink, immorality, morphine, gambling, are doing for others. One of the saddest sights, and yet, alas! one of the commonest, is to see men of brilliant ability sinking down beneath the waters of despair, not because they lack opportunity or resource, but because some evil habit has buried its fangs in their will, and they are helpless to unloosen the deadly grip. And there are habits of soul as well as habits of body. What laudanum did for Coleridge in body, selfishness, hypocrisy, worldliness, are doing for the minds of other men.

Now, there are two questions which a record like this inevitably suggests. The first, How are we to safeguard ourselves against the insidious power of such habits? There is no time in life when a man can say that he is beyond the reach of any evil habit. The newspapers almost every day contain the story of men in middle life and past middle life who make shipwreck on the shoals of evil habit. The second question is, How

are we to find deliverance from these habits when once they secure control of the will?

To these questions what answer has the gospel? Can the power of Christ break the chains of habit? I believe with all my heart and soul that Christ can deliver. Take the most hopeless, helpless victim of habit in this city to-night, the man whom friends have given over in despair, and let him come into living touch with Christ through simple faith, and for that man there is deliverance even from the tyranny of life-long habit. It is to point him to this Christ, who is all-sufficient and all-powerful, whom no habit can defy, that I speak these words.

What, then, is habit? The word itself, of course, is simply the old English word meaning a dress or garment, so that, strictly speaking, *habit* is the robe of character. It is the garment of the soul. It hides, and yet in a very real sense it reveals, character. Just as you recognize a man by his dress, so you recognize character through its habits. Slovenly dress implies slovenly person, slovenly habits imply a slovenly character. There are slaves of dress, and there are slaves of habit, — people whose lives are ordered by a dull routine, in which there is no break year after year, until at last death, that oldest habit of all, lays its hands upon them and sets them free.

It may perhaps make our line of thought a little more definite if I try to sketch for you the biog-

raphy of a habit. And first, as to its birth. How does habit begin? It begins in tendency. As coming events cast their shadows before, so tendency is the shadow of habit. That is to say, each one of us inherits certain tendencies, a bias of soul towards certain things. These inborn tendencies, if allowed to develop, become the prophecies of habit. Tendency, in fact, is habit in the making. That is why certain habits exert such a tremendous power over the lives of some of us. They spring from an inherited predisposition, rooted in the soil of our nature and fed through the long stream of heredity. That, too, is the reason why for one man moderate drinking may be, humanly speaking, a safe indulgence, but for another man the same amount of liquor would and often does in six months develop the drink habit, which is ruin to body and soul. In the one man there is the inbred disposition. The tendency to drink, feeding on inherited predisposition, strengthens the habit until it becomes a tyranny in the life.

Here lies one of the most solemn aspects of a parent's or teacher's responsibility, — the watching of tendency in the formative years of youth. Our children inherit from us and through us certain tendencies which, unless they are curbed, and, it may be, destroyed in youth, may lead into habits that will make later life a wilderness of misery.

I notice that medical writers lately have had a good deal to say about what they call the "con-

vertibility of disease"; in other words, a physical defect or disease in one generation passes down to the next generation in a changed and perhaps aggravated form. For example, epilepsy in a parent will appear in a child in a tendency to paralysis; hysteria in one generation will express itself in melancholia in the next; melancholia will appear again in a tendency to mania; and mania in its turn will break out in suicide or homicide. So disease, as it is handed down from generation to generation, is converted into new and aggravated forms. It is just so with tendency and habit. The tendencies of one generation become the habits of the next in new and aggravated forms. I remember a minister in Scotland, a brilliant preacher, who was the victim of the fatal habit of insincerity, so that upon certain occasions it seemed impossible for him to tell the truth. The habit appeared in his son in the tendency to theft, and in process of time that son became a thief and served his term in prison. I think of another man at college, a popular student, but whose tongue was used for the filthiest, vilest form of language that it is possible for a man to use. His father was a notorious blasphemer. Profanity of speech in one generation had become filth and uncleanness in the next. So, I repeat, the tendency of one generation becomes a habit in the next. You may say that you have done with your habits, but they have not done with you

or your children. By the awful power of heredity they live on. Tendency is destiny. It is the seal of character. Watch your tendencies. However simple they may be in thought, they have an enormous growth, and from thought they pass into speech, and from speech into fixed habits of life.

Notice, now, one or two things which stimulate the growth of habit. If habit begins in tendency, what are some of the things which develop the shadowy tendency into actual habit? There are two things, I think, which may be said to strengthen habit. In the first place, our habits are very largely determined and developed by emotion, passion, feeling. We do certain things, often till they become habitual, because our feelings lead us that way. We like to do certain things, and the emotional *like* passes into the habitual *act*. Habit is crystallized feeling. It is emotion embalmed. And if the emotion is pure, the habit is pure. But God help, God pity, the man whose lower habits are fed from the fires of inflamed passion or unholy desire. God help the man whose daily habits draw strength from sordid passion. When passion joins hands with habit, ruin of body and soul is the result.

An army surgeon in India tells in his published diary how one evening a soldier rushed into his tent and told him that one of his comrades was drowning in a pond close by, and no one could

save him because of the dense weeds which covered the surface. "On hastening to the spot," writes the surgeon, "I found the poor fellow in his last struggle, attempting to extricate himself from the meshes of the rope-like grass that encircled his body; but the more he labored to escape, the more firmly the weeds became coiled around his limbs. When the body was finally recovered, I shall never forget the expression of the dead man's face, the clenched teeth, the fearful distortion of countenance, while coils of long, trailing weeds clung round his body and limbs, the muscles of which stood out stiff and rigid, while his hands grasped thick masses; showing how he had struggled for life."

It is a terrible picture of the power of habit coiling round the soul that is struggling in the seething waters of passion. For one of the terrible features of habit is its ramifying power. Its ramifications reach into every activity of the soul. It coils around the will and strangles it; it coils around the conscience and numbs it; it takes one and another of a man's powers until habit, stimulated through passion, becomes the monstrous tyrant of his life.

The other thing which strengthens habit is companionship. While there are habits which grow in solitude, yet for the most part habit is a social trait. It grows strong in company. It expands by association. That is why certain of

the baser habits, such as drunkenness, gambling, immorality, flourish most rankly in the hot-bed of city life. Where men jostle together and population swarms in the seething slums, there habits of unspeakable vileness grow like rank and loathsome weeds. That is what invests companionship with such a tremendous power alike for good or evil. Companionship is the reservoir of habit. The quality of our daily habits, their tenacity on the will, are profoundly influenced by the quality of our daily associations. There are many men, indeed, for whom deliverance from certain habits is absolutely impossible until they change the environment of their friendships.

But it is not alone sufficient for us to ask how far our companions influence us, but how far and in what direction are we influencing our companions. It is all very well to speak of the perils of bad companionship, as if all the bad companions never came into the church and only the victims of them heard the preacher's message. There are men who count it a pride to initiate the innocent into the first knowledge of vice. There are men who plume themselves because they can forge the first links in the chain of habit that drags down an innocent soul to hell. And for such men I can conceive no salvation, in this world or in the world to come.

You may tell me that you alone are responsible for your habit; that it is not any one's business

but yours what habits you practice. You are prepared to answer to God, if there is a God, for your habits, but you do not propose to allow any one to interfere with your freedom. Very good. In the same way I may say it is no business of yours what kind of coat I wear. This coat is my own and I do not propose to have you criticise it. But suppose this coat of mine has been wrapped around a fever-stricken patient; suppose it has covered a man in the last stages of typhus or small-pox, and I come into your home with it, and through its infection spread disease and death among your children. Will it avail me before God or man to say I did n't know, I did n't think? You tell me that no one is responsible for your habits but yourself. Very well. But habit is the garment of the soul. It is the robe of character. And if these habits of yours are steeped in the infection of vice and degradation, and you come into the homes of innocence and by an unconscious influence spread the deadly contagion of your habits, then before God you stand responsible for that contagion.

The last chapter in the biography of habit is its enthronement, its tyranny over the will. That, of course, is the last act in the tragedy of every habit, that, instead of being an aid to the will, it becomes its master. O terrible condition, when a man is so gripped by the power of his habits that his will has no voice in the legislation of his soul;

when conscience is dumb, although it knows that only death is the outlook!

I remember hearing Henry Drummond once telling of a man who had gone to a London physician to consult about his eyes. The physician looked into the man's eyes with a delicate ophthalmoscope, and then said quietly to the man, "My friend, you are practicing a certain sin, and unless you give it up, in six months you will be blind." For a moment the man stood trembling in the agony of discovery, and then, turning to the sunlit window, he looked out and exclaimed, "Farewell, sweet light, farewell!"

Now it is just here that the gospel meets us. At this point in the biography of habit Jesus Christ intervenes. Is it possible that any man or woman in this last stage in the triumph of soul-destroying habit Christ can save? Ah! friends, unless I believed that, I should not have tortured you by this analysis of evil habit; but it is because I do believe that for just such victims of loathsome habit Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour that I ask you to test His power to-night. In your weakness, in your helplessness, in your despair, cast yourself upon His grace, and with strong crying and tears, with sobs of agony, claim His power; and His power will surely come. Not perhaps in an instant will you find absolute deliverance. Coleridge in his "Aids to Reflection" says that the magnetic needle for some time

after the disturbing influence has been withdrawn wavers before it finally points to its pole. So even after an evil companionship has been taken away, the soul will still waver before it finally turns to Christ in absolute steadfastness.

Remember above all things else that the promise of Christ is not simply reformation of habit, but regeneration of nature by the power of His quickening Spirit. Killing a vice will not create a virtue, and starving a bad habit will not feed a good one. What we need is to make our religion not an impulse, but a daily habit of soul. And through that life of habitual trust and daily fellowship with Christ the tyranny of evil habit will be forever destroyed. So your deliverance will come. Though it tarry, wait for it. And for you the day will break when the chains of life-long habit shall be cast aside and you shall stand in the radiance of Christ-bought liberty.

VIII

CONVICTION

I am persuaded. — 2 TIMOTHY i. 12.

YOU have noticed how frequently and with what significance these words fell from the Apostle's lips. They sing through his life like a trumpet note witnessing to the intensity of his faith and the certainty of his hope in Jesus Christ. They are the utterance of a man who had so tested the reality of his belief that nothing in heaven or on earth, in time or eternity, could weaken or destroy it. "I am persuaded," he says, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "I am persuaded," he writes again, "that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

The word, in short, — for as Paul used it it was only one word, — evidences the power of conviction as a dominant element in the Apostle's life and character. Paul was emphatically a man of burning conviction, and therein lay the secret of his far-reaching influence as a religious leader.

It is the power of conviction in every branch of life to-day that I wish to emphasize as one of the supreme needs of our time. The demand everywhere is for men of conviction. There is no more hopeful feature in the life of our country at this present moment than the growing realization that the true instinct of leadership is to be found not in mere ability by itself, not in the qualities of the so-called good fellow, not in the power of organizing parties and pulling strings of political expediency, but more and more in the supreme qualities of conviction. The man of the hour is he who has convictions and who has the courage of his convictions. The man of conviction may doubtless make his mistakes, he will find his enemies, he must be content to see many of the prizes of popular applause pass by him, but he "comes to his own at last." In the unshaken confidence of the people the influences of his convictions are the bedrock of abiding influence.

Yet, on the other hand, the absence of conviction in the deeper concerns of life is still to be deplored. Expediency has taken the place of conviction with many of us, and compromise has invaded the empire of principle. Our code of ethics is concerned more with the things we may do than with the things we ought to do. Morality and truth have become, for many people in our country, a kind of gymnastics in which the point

is to see how far the conscience — or the proprieties, which is the only conscience some people have — can be stretched without breaking; and an overstretched conscience, like an overstretched elastic band, lacks the power of resistance and recoil. It hangs limp and useless, like a distended nerve. But conviction is the tonic of conscience and the bracer of faith. The man of conviction wastes no time in attempting to square the circle of truth. Persuaded in his own mind, the path of duty for him leads straight ahead, and conviction carries him onward with resistless step.

All strong character is the utterance of deep conviction. The quality of permanence of any life is in exact proportion to the strength of moral persuasion that lies behind it. You and I will be remembered after we have passed from this earthly sphere just in the proportion that we have lived true to our dominant convictions. Every great movement of reform that has moved the world to passion and power has had at its heart the pulse-beat of some great conviction. Conviction is the soul of consistency, and consistency is the nerve of faith. Faith without conviction is a nerveless thing, but consistency without conviction is an impossible thing. What, then, is this power which enables a man to say, with the Apostle, towards the great ideals and experiences of life, "I am persuaded"? Nothing is more common than to belittle or distort con-

viction in the conduct of life. The cheapening of a word means the depreciation of an ideal. The moment a word becomes current coin in the kingdom of cant, it is counterfeit in the kingdom of truth. And there are tendencies in life which seek to emasculate this word of its high meaning and purpose.

For example, with some people conviction is only another name for *inclination*. Inclination is desire with grit left out of it. It is a thing of the moods rather than of the will. The man of inclination does something because he feels like it, not because he ought to or must. How constantly we meet people who are proud of telling us that they have very strong likes or dislikes, especially dislikes, and nothing is more common than for such persons to suppose that their likes and dislikes, especially dislikes, are the evidence of deep conviction on their part. The very opposite may be the truth. Strong passion means weak reason, and strong inclination may evidence weak conviction. The trouble with this type of character is that you never can tell when the emotional like will change into the dogged dislike, or when the blood-heat of enthusiasm will suddenly drop to the zero of indifference.

With other people conviction is only a fine name for prejudice. Prejudice is disinclination in the chronic stage. There are always people who, because they label their prejudices as conviction,

assume they are infallible. But, as a matter of fact, prejudice is simply the rags of belief, it is belief worn out. Some people hug their prejudices as a tramp hugs his rags in the cold. Prejudice is the lynch-law of society, it is condemnation without evidence or judgment. It is the pillory of conventionalism, and who can tell how many pioneers along the pathway of truth, in whose souls the vision of a great ideal is fresh, have been literally slain by the murderous hands of unreasoning prejudice masquerading in the robes of conviction?

Again, there are those who confound opinion with conviction. There are always men who have opinions upon every subject under heaven, but have convictions on none. Opinion defines what a man thinks, but conviction interprets what a man believes. There is no more striking example in history between the man of burning conviction and the man of mere opinion, brilliant, intellectual though it was, than between Luther and Erasmus. Both men were children of the Reformation. Into the souls of both had come the dawn of the New Light of Liberty. Erasmus, brilliant, clear of judgment, keen of utterance, was the man of opinion. To him the Reformation was simply an intellectual movement. He interpreted its ideals along the lines of clear thinking. But Luther, rude, rough, untutored, was the man of conviction. It was conviction that enabled him, stand-

ing alone before the allied powers of church and state, to cry, "Here stand I, so help me God, I cannot do otherwise." And Luther to-day is remembered as the apostle and leader of liberty, while Erasmus is, for the great mass of men, forgotten and unknown. Conviction lives, while mere opinion dies.

But some one may say at this point, "Does not conviction narrow a man? Is not the man of conviction but a step removed from the bigot? Does not the very intensity of his belief make him intolerant of the beliefs of other men who do not think just as he does?" Not so, for conviction is not to be confounded with bigotry. Bigotry is the weapon of error warring against enlightenment, but conviction is the weapon of enlightenment warring against error. Bigotry is devotion to some form or dogma, but conviction is loyal to the truth itself. The man of conviction is tolerant because he is sure. His vision of truth is large enough for him to realize that no one individual can form all its rays, and it is sufficient for him to be persuaded of the reality of what he has seen. The bigot, on the other hand, seeks to make truth a monopoly, and in the name of religion to hand over the salvation of the race into the hands of a close corporation, which he calls the Church, whose doors are padlocked with forms and dogmas the combination of which is known only to the officials in the concern. Of course, one

has to guard a true tolerance from mere toleration. If there is one thing worse than the spirit of unprincipled intolerance, which is the temper of the bigot, it is the spirit of unprincipled toleration, which is the temper of the skeptic. Unprincipled intolerance is like the sword-fish, all backbone; unprincipled toleration is like the jelly-fish, no backbone at all. And it is this type of moluscous, backboneless religion, without deep conviction, that is one of the most distressing features of contemporary religion. What the Church needs to-day is the development of a type of Christian character which in its breadth and tolerance can say with the Apostle, in regard to the verities of the faith, "I am persuaded."

Turning now for a few moments to the more positive aspect of our subject, let us look at the quality of religious conviction in these three ways: first, in its *intellectual* expression; second, in its *ethical* expression, and third, in its *spiritual* expression.

I. From the intellectual point of view, conviction may be defined as knowledge born of experience. When truth is wedded to experience, conviction is born. When a man can say, "I know because I have learned by experience," he speaks with the voice of conviction. That man is the bearer of a message, and his message is prophetic, for the word of the Prophet is that which comes out of the passion and struggle of the soul.

That is the genius of eloquence, the eloquence of conviction. We do not decry the learning which comes from books or through contact with an educational institution, but all such knowledge lacks the quality of conviction until it has been translated into a man's own experience. Not poets alone learn in suffering what they teach in song. It is the novitiate through which every great soul must pass that would move the world to passion and to power. Experience teaches fools, but it graduates character. Experience is the great school in life where book knowledge has vitalized into conviction. It was Huxley who said that "the first requisite of a man of science was moral earnestness." And he was right. Education that exists as a thing apart from a man's daily experience is the cheapest kind of veneer. So religion, if it is separated from conduct, is simply a kind of fetich in your life. It degenerates into a mere Sunday liability instead of being, as it ought, a week-day asset. The creed that amounts to anything is not distinguished by its quantity, but by its quality. Better far be able to say "I am persuaded" towards one great fundamental truth that is made the very essence of your own character, that is wrought into the fibers of your own experience, than to say perfunctorily of a hundred dogmas, "I accept them all." Your confession of faith may be brief as a single sentence, but the question is, Is it true

for you? Is it something, growing out of your own experience, of which you can say "I am persuaded"?

II. In the ethical sphere conviction may be defined as conscience articulate in duty. We use conscience simply as a warning against sin, not as an inspiration to duty. Conscience has a nobler function than that of a moral policeman in the soul. It is the voice of God calling to strenuous effort and increasing struggle. Take conscience from duty and it becomes the drudgery of a hireling. If I do something because I must, I am no better than a slave. If I do something because I ought, I am better than a king. Conscienceless duty is duty dethroned. A man who enters upon his life work deliberately putting conscience one side is not only degrading his career, but he is handicapping his own influence. The world soon learns to discredit the man who has no convictions towards his daily work. There can be no dignity in labor where there is no conscience in the laborer, there can be no honor in capital where there is no conscience in the capitalist. Capital without conscience becomes a tyranny, labor without conscience becomes a slavery. And I make bold to say that the struggle between capital and labor, as we are witnessing it in a hundred different forms to-day, will not be healed until the voice of conscience is made supreme in both. When employers and employees meet to-

gether on the common basis of conscience, the convictions of both as to what is right will join hands in fraternal respect. What we want to realize is that conscience transfigures duty, sweetens and sanctifies it. Our most irksome tasks lose half their sting when we face them for conscience' sake. Nothing is too trivial when we lift it into the light of conviction.

On the other hand, it is the absence of conscience in work that is to-day so great a menace to the well-being of society. It is the lack of conscience in duty that eats the manhood out of trade and commerce as well as professional life. Who wants to consult a conscienceless lawyer? Who wants a physician without conscience in his home? Who wants to listen to a minister without conscience in his teaching? The man of conviction is he who before every task will say "I am persuaded," and in obedience to the dictates of his highest ideals does his work for conscience' sake. Such a man wins respect, he invites confidence, and finally attains enduring success.

III. In its spiritual and highest aspect conviction is defined as faith centered in a person. Paul did not say, "I know what I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep me." What made Paul's faith a glorious inspiration in his life was that he could say, "I know *whom* I have believed, and am persuaded that *He* is able." Conviction for him was born of the glorious

reality that with him in all his life-work was the presence of a personal friend. It is so when life attains its highest power. The man in whose thought a personal God has no place and in whose conduct the living Christ has no influence is depleting his soul of its highest possibilities. As you face the tasks of life, believe me, you can carry in your hearts no better assurance of happiness and peace, along whatever line you may be led, than in this thought, that your faith is centered in the living Christ.

IX

SINCERITY

I pray that ye may be sincere until the day of Christ.

PHILEMON i. 10.

ACCORDING to some authorities *sincere* is the English rendering of two Latin words, *sine cera*. In the old Roman law these words were constantly used in builders' contracts. They were a frequent condition attached to an architect's specifications. Especially in the building of the residences of the Roman aristocracy, where the famous marble from Mount Athos was used, it sometimes happened that a block of marble would be chipped in transportation or in placing it in position, or a piece stained by some flaw would be used by the builder; and instead of rejecting it the makers had a trick of doctoring the marble by filling out the broken edge or covering over the surface of the stone with a solution of white wax. This they did in such perfect imitation of the original stone that sometimes not even the most critical eye could detect the counterfeit. But what was hidden from sight time with remorseless hand revealed. A keen winter's frost or sultry summer's heat

falling on the white marble surface brought to light the trick. The wax began to melt and break away piece by piece, until the broken edge or disfigured surface was exposed, and the symmetry of the building was destroyed. Hence, to avoid any such trickery, a clause was invariably inserted in the contract that such buildings should be completed *sine cera*, that is, without wax. Such may be the origin of our word *sincere*. It implies that which is absolutely genuine without any solution of counterfeit or hypocrisy rubbed over what is worthless and base.

But when the Apostle offered this prayer on behalf of his beloved Philippian converts, that they might be sincere, it was another picture which presented itself to his mind. Writing in Greek, it was a Greek image which suggested itself to him. Not to the law courts, but to the market-place, Paul went for the idea which underlies this prayer. The Greek word used here means literally *tested in the sunlight*. The idea was this. The shops or booths in the market-place of an Oriental town are low covered archways, lighted only by a door, which is choked up with goods exposed for sale. In the gloom of this place the merchant sits, surrounded by the most precious portions of his stock or the hardest to sell. Suppose you wish to buy a present for a friend. You enter the low doorway, and the merchant produces what you want or what he

says you want. He names the price, and if you are a fool you consent to it, close the bargain, and carry off your prize. This is what happens next: what looked genuine and beautiful in the dim (but not religious) light of the store is seen to be shoddy and tarnished in the sunlight outside. What you bought as a bargain turns out to be a sell, in which you feel that you, and not your purchase, have been the article practically sold. Hence the custom of experienced buyers in the Oriental mart, before purchasing any article within the store, was, first of all, to examine it carefully outside the store, then, if it stood the test of the light, to complete the purchase. So the prayer of the Apostle is that these Philippian Christians may be men and women whose inherent worth shall stand the test of the open day, or, in the words before us, be sincere in the day of Jesus Christ. The *day* of Christ, the great day of soul-testing, is before them, the Apostle remembers, when out of the gloom of the world's market-place the soul of each man shall be lifted up into the white light of God's scrutiny. "In that day," says Paul, "God grant that you may stand the test."

Such, then, are the two pictures that lie behind our text. We shall not throw either of them away, because both are suggestive. From different standpoints they emphasize a quality in human character without which integrity is impossible, a

quality, moreover, which some of us — nay, let us be frank — all of us might cultivate a little more assiduously with advantage to ourselves and to the Church of Christ. Sincerity from two points of view, from the Roman or legal standpoint and from the Greek or mercantile standpoint, — that is our subject.

From its Latin origin we see what sincerity is; from its Greek standpoint we see how sincerity is vindicated. In the combination we ought to get a tolerably clear idea of the grace of sincerity.

Very practically, then, and very earnestly, I wish to make clear that sincerity is not one of the minor morals, nor its opposite — insincerity — one of the minor vices. Sincerity is no Sunday grace, no mere adornment of the soul, which we may do without. Alike in thought and action it is part of the structure of character, something that is built into its very walls and which must be tested by the storm and stress of daily life, to lack which is to rob life of its symmetry and strength. Some of you may remember in this connection Mr. Froude's trenchant criticism of Cicero in his brilliant monograph on that subject: "Such, indeed, was Cicero; a tragic combination of magnificent talent, high aspirations, and true desire to do right; but with a latent insincerity of character which neutralized and almost makes us forget his nobler qualities. With this insincerity it seems as if nature had half made a great man

and left him incomplete." Such is the judgment of the secular historian on the tremendous neutralizing power of insincerity. How much more solemn must be the judgment of Him who searcheth the hearts and before whom we must all stand at last in the Day of Jesus Christ! "I pray that ye may be sincere."

The importance of sincerity in character and life may be estimated if you remember that truth, which is the foundation of character, has three children, honesty, veracity, and sincerity. Note the distinction between these three. Veracity is truth revealed in speech; honesty is truth revealed in action; but sincerity is truth revealed in thought. And there can be no real truthfulness, either in speech or action, unless behind both there is sincerity in thought.

Keeping, then, before us the original meaning of sincerity, something without wax or veneer, we may define the word as simply meaning wholeness of character. A sincere man is a whole-souled man. He is all of one piece. Rough in appearance he may be, unpolished in manners, but he has not sought to hide the real merits of his character by a veneer of manner or cheap polish of affectation foreign to his nature. How refreshing it is to meet such a man! To know a person who is absolutely sincere, who means what he says, is like the tonic of a mountain breeze. You may not agree with him in many of his

opinions and convictions, very likely you will violently disagree with him, but none the less there is a moral elevation about such a soul which compels your respect even if it does not always carry your conviction. Of course, in saying this I do not mean to say that affectation in manner necessarily means insincerity of character. By no means. Affectation is often due to shyness, a certain timidity which for some people is constitutional, and it would be a harsh and false judgment to say that because a person had a certain affectation in manner he was therefore insincere in nature. Wholeness is the essential condition of sincerity. And what is wholeness? It is a Bible word. It is simply holiness, — “holiness,” says the Apostle, “without which no man shall see the Lord”; and yet *holiness* and *sincerity* are only different names for the same great virtue, with this distinction, — holiness defines that virtue in relation to God; sincerity defines it in relation to man. Holiness towards God is the secret of sincerity towards man. Notice for a moment one or two ways in which sincerity reveals its power in life. Take, for example, our motives. You can see at once how any admixture of motive, any veneer of pretense in our motives, destroys the purity of the actions they inspire and hinders the blessing of our charity. I may, for example, give some gift to a philanthropic institution. From the standpoint of size it may be magnificent.

It ought to inspire others. Yet, if the motive which inspired me will not stand the test of the light, if beneath the surface generosity there lies the ugly flaw of a selfish prudence, a keen eye to the main chance, the thought of how the world will estimate my gift, then how cheap, how poor, that gift appears! Many of our charities to-day, I fear, are built up with the wax of a rival liberality. So many a time the contribution or charity fails in blessing the giver and the receiver simply because it is the expression of a meanness of soul that has been veneered with the wax of a mock liberality. On the other hand, let the motive be pure, whole-souled, and though it inspire but the most trivial act of love, that act becomes a note in the swelling harmony of goodness and passes into the eternal music of the universe.

Again, in the sphere of language, in our daily speech, how constantly we may trace the same tendency! Take, for example, the ministry of kind words. The utterance of kind words is surely one of the sweetest and most blessed ways in which a man can cheer his fellows. To be able to say the right thing in the right way just at the right time, when the heart chords are jangling and out of tune, when the nerves are unstrung, is a gift which makes the possessor one of God's angels of cheer. Kind words sincerely spoken, without the veneer of flattery rubbed over them, — ah, who in the sore moments of life has not felt

their power and breathed a benediction of gratitude upon the lips that uttered them? Yet, alas, on the other hand, there are those for whom this ministry of kind words has become simply a gloss of superficial feeling. How easy it is to make kind words the superficial varnish of a treacherous heart! I once crossed the ocean with a man who impressed me as one of the most charming conversationalists. He sat beside me at table and his language was beautiful. He was a good fellow in the best sense. Afterward I learned he was a notorious profligate and blackguard who had treated his wife shamefully. But the veneer was there, and it needed more than a seven days' ocean voyage to rub it off. Just because it is so easy to say them, people almost unconsciously form the habit of saying things they do not really mean. To make a good impression, to stand well in the opinion of some one, many of us accustom ourselves to put cheap varnish of flattery upon our speech, the falseness of which time reveals, when we are called on to translate our fine words into living deeds. Then, when the varnish is rubbed off, when the cheap solution of the white wax of flattery has worn away, the innate selfishness that lay behind our fine words is revealed. Our character is seen in its nakedness. We lack wholeness.

What is insincerity in speech? It is not falsehood. Plenty of people are insincere in their

words who would scorn the very thought of telling a deliberate lie. Insincerity in speech may be nothing but truth dressed up with too many clothes. You may veil truth and still keep it truth; but when you overdress it, you destroy it. Adorning the truth with exaggeration is like whitewashing a piece of marble.

Out of this tendency springs the fatal habit so common in our day, in society and in business, — the habit of equivocation, equivocation in act as well as word. Equivocation is a canker that lies at the root of much of our modern social life. It is a kind of atmosphere in which many people live and move and have their being. In some quarters, indeed, it is regarded as a necessary condition of success in life. Too mean to tell the truth, too cowardly to tell a deliberate falsehood, people become adepts in half lies. What is a half lie? It is a falsehood with a solution of truth rubbed over it, and a mighty thin solution it sometimes is! A half lie is the healing ointment which a hypocrite uses for salving a troubled conscience.

Now, the danger of this habit of insincerity of speech is not seen in its immediate results, but it is felt in its permanent effects upon the soul. Equivocation in speech becomes sooner or later hypocrisy in character. Insincerity, like every other vice, is insidious in its growth. From stray words it passes into repeated statements, and from repeated statements it crystallizes into a

habit of thought. And the habit of insincerity is death to the soul. Of course the last stage of this insincerity is in the incarnate hypocrite. The worst hypocrite of all is not he who deceives the world, but he who deceives himself. The word hypocrite means, originally, a man behind a mask. The mask bears the legend of truth, but the face behind it is stamped with the mark of deceit. It is a common thing to suppose that hypocrites are found only in religious circles. I venture to say that the most consummate hypocrites in the world to-day are found, not in the Church, but outside the Church, amongst those who sneer at religion yet parade before the world a respectability and standing in society which they do not possess and on which they have no claims whatever. It is no exaggeration to say that certain phases of modern society simply rest upon the rotten foundations of hypocrisy, so that it has become among certain classes of people a fine art to dissemble, to appear to be that which in reality you are not. Take, for example, the hypocrisy of the man who pretends to discard religion because he has already discarded morality, the man who poses as a skeptic when in reality he is a profligate. Skepticism is often the gloss which a blackguard uses to hide the festering corruption of vice? The most consummate hypocrite is not he who conceals vice behind the semblance of virtue, but he who makes the vice to which he has no objection a stalking-

horse to cover the darker sins which it is his interest to hide.

Such, then, is a rapid sketch of insincerity, — from motive to speech, from speech to habit, from habit to character. How, then, can we be sincere? Let us realize that sincerity is not only possible, but necessary. As Shakespeare says,

“To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

Sincerity is the fruit of devotion to a high ideal. You must begin by being sincere before the bar of your own soul. “To thine own self be true.” That is the first requisite in sincerity. Do not say, “Let me begin by being sincere to my wife or husband or friend.” No; begin here in your own self, be true to your own ideals and principles. All else is useless till we begin with that. Sincerity is not so much a grace by itself as the aroma of other graces. It is emphatically the flower of purity. Only as our life is pure is sincerity possible. Only as our thought and words are the utterance of a childlike simplicity can we build our characters for eternity without the white wax of deceit. It is only where people are leading a double life that they need to paint the outer life with the veneer of mock sentiment. No doubt for a time that may do. The veneer will stand. The counterfeit will pass for genuine.

The hypocrite will sit down with the saint. But not always. The day of testing comes at last. The white sepulchre is torn asunder. The man who stole the livery of heaven that he might serve the devil in it is exposed. That is the thought suggested by the Apostle when he prays that we may stand the test in the day of Jesus Christ. What is that day of Christ? It is the Day of Judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, when we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Dare we face it? Can our secret souls stand that light? What we need is that God should take the knife of cleansing power and cut out from our hearts the festering corruption of insincerity. And he can do that. He can deliver those to whom insincerity has become second nature. We have our faults, our failings, our besetting sins. Let us bring them to-day to the footstool of God's mercy-seat. Let us lay them before the cross, so that with that blood which cleanses from all sin our hearts may be purified, and sincerity shall become the controlling influence in daily life, and we shall be pure even as Christ Himself is pure.

X

DISCOURAGEMENT

He shall not fail nor be discouraged. — ISAIAH xlii. 4.

I SUPPOSE there is no mood so common as that of disheartenment. We get discouraged about ourselves, sometimes about our physical health, sometimes about our spiritual condition; or we get discouraged about our work, its lack of success, its disappointments and difficulties, or we get discouraged about our families. In a hundred different ways discouragement of one kind or another thrusts its gloomy shadow across our path and chills our brightest days. Yet, if you ask, What is discouragement? it is about the hardest thing in the world to explain. There is something so vague and intangible about it that you cannot even to yourself describe it. "What are you discouraged about?" you ask a man with a face reflecting almost every depth of depression. And he replies, "Oh, I don't know; I just feel miserable and depressed"; and that is about all he can tell you. Yet it is that vagueness that makes the peril of discouragement so subtle a danger in our lives. If it were some-

thing definite, — if, for instance, it faced a man openly, like some positive difficulty, — he could grapple with it; but discouragement is the ghost of difficulty. Difficulty meets you squarely in the face, but discouragement haunts you. It is a kind of mental malaria, an insidious disease of the mind, sometimes chronic, sometimes acute, which poisons the will and paralyzes its energies. That is what makes discouragement so often the vestibule of temptation. The discouraged man is the easily tempted man. He is ready to accept any relief, to take advantage of any open door that will deliver him from the intolerable pressure upon his soul. So often the door which swings open at such a moment leads to sin, not because he wants to sin, but because, being discouraged, he wants to escape from depression. For example, one man in discouragement flies to drink, not because he is a drunkard, but because he wants to drown his depression in alcohol, and he ends by drowning himself. Another man embezzles, not because he is a thief, but because, being discouraged, he wants a short cut out of his financial troubles and the short cut brings him across lots to state's prison. Another man commits suicide, not because he loves death, but because discouragement has made him weary of life.

In the old monasteries of Europe there was a species of mental or spiritual disease prevalent amongst the monks which was known by the name

of *accidie*. It is an obsolete word now, although you will find it in any of your English dictionaries. In the Middle Ages this sin of *accidie* was so common that one of the fathers, Cassian, wrote an elaborate treatise upon it. What is *accidie*? Cassian defines it as disgust of soul or weariness of life. "When a monk is first attacked by it," says this old writer, "he detests the place where he is and loathes his cell. He becomes critical, and thinks that his brother monks are unspiritual and neglectful of their duties. He dwells much on the excellence of other and distant monasteries, and the more distant they are the more excellent he thinks them. He pictures to himself the pleasant and profitable life there. All that immediately surrounds him is harsh and distasteful." Such was the sin of *accidie* in medieval times. It was the mark of a discouraged man. It was the soil out of which slothfulness proceeded. Although the word has become obsolete, I am not so sure that the thing for which the word stands has become obsolete. There are lots of people to-day who, although they do not know it, are suffering from the sin of *accidie*, discouraged not so much about themselves as about the success of other people. Their depression springs not so much from their own sense of failure as from the sense of achievement in their neighbors. It may seem harsh, but a great deal of depression in the world is aroused by envy. The man who envies

the success of others binds himself into the gloomy house of discouragement.

You remember, of course, with what truth Dickens has hit off this type of the discouraged soul in his wonderful picture of Mrs. Gummidge, the "lone, lorn creeter," with whom everything went contrary and of whom David Copperfield is reported to have said that "she whimpered sometimes more than was comfortable for other parties, and there were moments when it would have been more agreeable, I thought, if Mrs. Gummidge had had a convenient apartment of her own to retire to, and had stopped there until her spirits revived." Mrs. Gummidge has a large family of children who do not bear her name but who inherit her characteristics.

There is, no doubt, a good deal of discouragement which is temperamental. Some people are born into the world at an angle at which they see everything under sable clouds. Enthusiasm of any kind depresses them. While they do no doubt serve a good purpose in restraining the unbalanced enthusiasm of sanguine people, at the same time they have a good deal to answer for in the way of adding to the depression of the world. But the sanguine temperament brings its discouragements. It is also true that a good many of our discouragements are dyspeptic in their origin. A little open-air exercise will do more than a religious service to chase away the blues for a

good many of us. But, as I have said, the trouble with all this type of discouragement is that it is a contagious disease. Its germs scattered through a home or a church will poison the atmosphere and destroy all healthy joy and hopefulness.

On the other hand, we must not forget—as indeed who can?—that there are a great many real discouragements in life which tax the faith and endurance of the bravest soul. There are, for example, the discouragements of business life. A man builds up for himself, after years of toil, a position of independence and integrity in the business world; then in a moment, by the dishonesty of some trusted employee or through the failure of some other concern, he finds his business in ruins around him, the years of toil gone for nothing, and he himself perhaps branded as a defaulter. There is no harder or more bitter experience, nothing that so tests a man's grit and grace. On the other hand, I do not know anything that so impresses me with the inherent courage of some men as the way in which, after such a discouragement, they will take fresh heart and begin to build up again what the dishonesty or selfishness of others destroyed.

There is no more striking example of that than Sir Walter Scott when, through the failure of his publishers, he found himself, at fifty-five years of age, a ruined man, with the savings of a lifetime and the home he had built gone. Yet you remem-

ber what he wrote that day to a friend when the news reached him: "I feel neither dishonored nor broken down by the news I have received. I have walked my last in the domain which I have planted, sat for the last time in the halls I have built; but death would have taken them from me if misfortune had spared me." He closes the letter by saying that discouragement is to him a tonic and a bracer. We know how that spirit conquered. From the magic pen of the great writer flowed that marvelous series of works, the profits of which not only bought back Abbotsford and enabled him to pay his creditors to the last penny, but created for him a deathless name in literature.

I emphasize this because it reminds us of the hidden blessings of discouragement. Discouragement is not an unmitigated evil in life. I will go further and say that it is a good thing for any man or woman to be thoroughly discouraged once in a while; and that for several reasons. First of all, because discouragement is an excellent discipline in humility. Nothing will so humble a man, bring him down to his right level, as a period of depression. If that were not so, there would be no living with some people. Uninterrupted success has the effect of making some men intolerable nuisances, self-conceited, self-assertive, and overbearing. But discouragement is the great antiseptic to all conceit. It will take the pride out of a man quicker than any other experience.

Discouragements not only train us in humility, they test and develop the will. Our discouragements are a necessary part in the education of character. It is not enough to say that they are inevitable. The truest view is that which sees them as a necessity as well. Some men are like drums, you never hear of them until they are beaten. Failure reveals them. Discouragement enfranchises them in the roll of the world's great men. It would indeed be a terrible fate for human life if history had in it no records of discouragement. For it is out of such experiences, dark and terrible as many times they are, that are born some of the world's noblest heroes and are found some of the world's greatest discoverers. We learn wisdom indeed more often from our failures than our successes. We find out what will do, by learning what will not do. As has been so often said, the men who never make a mistake never make a discovery; and the man who never felt the pain of discouragement never felt the thrill of victory. The greatest things in life — the great thoughts, the great discoveries, the great philanthropies — have been nurtured in sorrow, wrought out through discouragement, and finally established with smiles. All along the line of life discouragement, for the highest natures, is a necessary factor in their growth and final success.

Yet, in order that this may be so, we must re-

member that it is one thing to have discouragements, but quite another thing to be discouraged. Every true soul has its discouragements, but no true soul is ever finally discouraged. How then, you ask, are we to overcome our discouragements in life?

I. Remember that discouragement can never be to the man of faith a permanent condition. If I were asked to give a motto to young men going out to fight the battle of sin, it would be this, Remember that somewhere the sun is always shining; if not here to-day, then to-morrow. However dark the present moment may seem, always remember that in Christ there is a brighter day coming. It is a long lane that has no turning. Man's discouragements become God's opportunities to the soul that puts its trust in Him.

A distinguished man of science once said that whenever in the course of his researches he encountered an apparently insuperable obstacle, he invariably found himself upon the brink of some new discovery. The darkest hour is before the dawn. Discouragement is the twilight of the soul; but remember there is a twilight before the sunrise as well as the twilight left from the sunset, and though the darkest hour precedes the dawn, yet even then in the darkness can be felt the subtle movements of life and can be heard the first utterances of day. To every soul beset by discouragements I would say in the Psalm-

ist's words, "Why art thou cast down, my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

II. In the second place, remember in your hours of discouragement the things that encourage. Do not let us forever be looking at the debtor side of our life's balance-sheet. Learn to see the things we can credit ourselves with before the mercy-seat of God. Learn, before all else, that while our discouragements can be counted on the fingers of one hand, our blessings are unnumbered. God often sends discouragements to us simply that He may throw into clearer relief our encouragements. Some blessing in life that we had overlooked, perhaps cast aside, is called into activity and thrown into a new meaning through some discouragement which God permits. Some men make a brilliant success in one business because they failed in another. So often discouragements stand at the parting of the ways in life, pointing out a new path of duty.

III. Lastly, remember the blessed power that comes through prayer. Nothing so quickens the spirit of prayer as this feeling of discouragement. Nothing so sends a man to his knees as the depression of his soul. Prayer links us to Him in whose bright lexicon of duty there is no such word as fail. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." What a triumphant note of hope

those words are! They proclaim the triumph of Christ's kingdom on earth. They quiver like the morning star in the canopy of the world's night of sin, proclaiming the dawn of the day that is to be when the whole world shall be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." From the human standpoint Christ did fail. In the world's judgment the cross was the seal of His failure. Yet out of that symbol of defeat has proceeded the conquering spirit of mankind. Throughout all these ages we trace the power of that spirit which through defeat and ignominy has conquered every discouragement. It is good to feel that in this triumph over the world's discouragements Christ asks you and me to share. Do you realize that it is only one hundred and ten years since the first Anglo-Saxon went forth to conquer the world for Christ? One hundred and ten years ago a poor cobbler who had received a collection of \$65.62 went out from England to evangelize India. So bitter was the opposition to him in Christian England that when his errand was discovered he was turned off the British ship on which he had taken his passage, and he had to reach India on board a Danish vessel. When he arrived there he found the opposition of the British authorities so bitter that he had to enroll himself as an indigo-planter in order to secure a footing in

that heathen land. A few months later his wife became a victim of mania and had to be restrained in a madhouse. Yet, single-handed, William Carey, in the face of such discouragement, laid the foundation of Christianity which to-day girdles all the earth.

Be it ours, in the slow fulfillment of the Divine purpose, to do our part and lend our help, not discouraged because of the way, but stepping fearlessly through the night, knowing that

“Out of the darkness of night
The world rolls into light.
It is daybreak everywhere.”

XI

PEACE

Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. — PHILIPPIANS iv. 4-7.

LET us look at this scene. A prison cell in Imperial Rome, A. D. 65. Nero, Emperor of infamous memory, is on the throne in the zenith of his cruel power. The aged prisoner who sits in the shadow of his cell, chained to a sentry, is now awaiting his sentence. With such a potentate on the throne he knows full well what that sentence must be. Too soon the hour of his departure shall come, and in those days of waiting this letter is written, — a farewell letter and written under such conditions is necessarily full of deep pathos and passionate conviction. Seated where the light from the narrow grated window falls most clearly is the amanuensis, Paul's secretary. He is a young man, and evidently recovering from some terrible sickness. It is

Epaphroditus. From this letter we learn that he had been sick nigh unto death, but God had mercy upon him and in gratitude for that deliverance his convalescent moments are spent in this lonely cell writing with painful hand on the huge parchment page the glowing thoughts of the great Apostle. The letter is almost ended. Epaphroditus has just written the words "And the peace of God." The Apostle pauses; for a moment the glowing continuity of his thought is stopped. How shall he describe this divine principle of Christian life? The peace of God! To what can he compare it, in what glowing figures can he explain this peace which comes as a legacy of the dying Christ? Still the Apostle pauses. The intellect whose burning thought so often thrilled the listening ear of men is baffled here, and so with a sort of anti-climax the sentence concludes, "which passeth all understanding."

I do not wish to define or explain this peace, nor shall I even attempt to do so. My purpose is to unfold the manner of the coming of this peace to the soul of man, to show how we may obtain it so that like a sentry it shall *guard* — for that is Paul's word here — our hearts and minds. Yet in the constant siege of worry, care, anxiety, and sorrow that is waged without and within, so many souls drive out this peace. But if this peace cannot be defined, it can be experienced; if not described with words, it can be realized in actual

experience; and that you and I may come nearer to its realization I ask attention to these closing verses of this beautiful epistle. Notice, first, that I have coupled this verse with the three preceding, beginning with the seventh verse, for a special reason. Too often these words, "The peace of God," are studied in an altogether wrong light. Very often they are used as a prayer, and occur constantly as a benediction, "May the peace of God keep your hearts and minds." Consequently many come to look at them as a devout aspiration, a pious wish, an ideal that possibly might be attained in some heavenly sphere. But that is not Paul's sense. As he uses them, they are at once a promise and a result, a definite statement of fact, "Peace *shall*." On condition of certain duties being performed, then as a result of that performance the peace of God comes. This is clearly brought out by the fact that this seventh verse is not detached. It is joined by the copula "And." Accordingly these words are not a pious aspiration, they are a simple statement of a spiritual result following the performance of certain duties. What are these duties? We find them unfolded in the three verses beginning at the fourth. In this verse Saint Paul divides human life into three great divisions of relationship: first, man in his relation to God; second, man in his relation to other men; third, man in his relation to himself. In those three spheres Paul

points out certain duties to be performed, — as relating to God, the duty is to rejoice; to men, to be gentle; to yourself, to be anxious for nothing. Then he adds, as a result, “The peace of God *shall* keep your hearts.” Fulfill these duties, rejoice in the Lord, be gentle to all men, be anxious for nothing — and the peace of God shall keep your hearts. It is a clear, logical result. Notice, then, this threefold duty of man which qualifies for this divine possession.

First. Rejoice in the Lord. I have already spoken of the sad, pathetic circumstances under which this epistle was written. Paul was under the shadow of death in the gloom of his prison cell. Everything had seemed to combine to dim the enthusiasm of the Apostle’s faith. Everything tended to break his spirit and drench his brightest hopes with gloom. Deserted by friends because all sought their own, in writing to Timothy about this time he says, “Demos hath forsaken me, only Luke is with me.” Yet in this hour of desertion, of approaching death, what is the prevailing key-note? Joy. In the first chapter in the fourth verse Paul writes: “Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy”; and at the eighteenth verse, “and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice”; and in the second chapter, seventeenth verse, “I joy and rejoice with you all”; and in the third chapter, first verse, “Brethren, rejoice in the Lord”; and

in the fourth chapter at the fourth verse, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." These are all examples of the exultant, joyful spirit. Now, what is its ground? Faith, personal faith in God. Rejoice in the Lord. Paul did not rejoice in self, he did not rejoice in the consciousness of what he had done, but in present communion with Christ, in the perfect rest on the promise of Christ. He rejoices, though all men fail him, and out of this experience Paul speaks to all mankind. As a command, he says, "Rejoice." Christian joy is a peace. It is more, — it is a duty, and that duty grows out of faith in Christ. To be Christian is to trust Christ, and the test of true faith is to rejoice. Come what will, as we rest in Christ the result will be joy. Therefore I say the mark of true Christianity in its Godward is joy. If the peace of God is to flow into our hearts, then we must learn to trust Christ so that His every thought is a source of joy and praise.

So I plead for the putting forth of this duty. Let men feel shining out from you as Christian men and women the joy that comes from communion with God. Let that religion of gloom, of sentimental depression, which some people think is Christian be banished. Seek to realize the dying prayer of Christ by your lives, that every joy may be fulfilled.

Second. As relating to men. Let your

“moderation” be known to all men. The word “moderation” is translated “forbearance” in the Revised Version, and that is more correct. It was one of Saint Paul’s favorite words. He often uses it to describe a Christian’s relation to his fellowmen. Writing to Timothy about the ideal bishop, he says he must be patient (Ancient Version), gentle (Revised Version). Again he tells Titus to put his church in a right mind, to be not a brawler but gentle, letting his meekness be known to all men. This, I say, was a favorite word of Saint Paul’s to describe the Christian nature to every man. The word is hard to translate in its full meaning; indeed no one English word will translate it. It combines two ideas, — self-restraint as touching ourselves; gentleness, forbearance towards others. As Paul means it, it is to be impatient with yourself, but patient towards others. It is the man who dreads fury, excitement, or passion as a sign of feebleness, who hates exaggeration of statement because exaggeration of statement weakens belief, who shrinks from vulgar self-display, who is patient because he is powerful, who is tolerant because he is sure, who is hopeful towards all men because he has found hope for himself. This moderation, this patience, we are asked to show to all men, without distinction. Gentle toward their weakness, forbearing toward their extravagances, patient with their faults. And in obedi-

ence to this command the peace of God becomes ours. Nothing more surely drives peace from the soul than the censorious spirit, continually finding fault, impatient towards the feelings of others. This is vital to peace, — to be gentle, forbearing. “Ah,” but some one may say, “how can I remember to be gentle? All of us know the hasty temper; how can we keep it in check?” Paul remembered that and supplied a remedy. “Be gentle, the Lord is at hand.” The Lord is here at your side, He will judge the faults of others. He did not revile when reviled. He seeks to implant meekness in all men, and by the constant realization of Christ’s nearness to us in every moment, at every place, we may become possessed of the peace that passeth understanding.

There are, then, the two spheres of life, the divine and the social, each with its duty for the Christian. In relation to God, rejoice; in relation to men, be gentle.

Now let us turn to ourselves. Paul gathers up that duty in the next verses in a twofold aphorism, negative duty and positive duty. The negative, what we shall not, is expressed by a phrase which the Ancient Version renders, “Be careful for nothing”; the Revised Version, “In nothing be anxious.” In the gospel, as used by Christ, “Take no thought” for example, as for the morrow, or what ye shall say. Literally the words are “Let nothing divide the mind,” and

can be translated into the language of to-day by two words, "Don't worry." That in effect is Paul's advice. As touching private affairs, he says, "Do not worry." Human life is the same in every age, and perhaps there is no very startling proof that it is susceptible to trouble or worry. What the Philippian Christian was, the business man to-day is. What the anxious Martha of Bethany was, the busy society woman of to-day feels, but possibly never so acutely as in our day. The conditions of life are peculiarly adapted to the creation of worry. It is the one thing which distinguishes our modern life in all its grades.

To all this the scriptural injunction is clear. One of the purely New Testament commands is, "Thou shalt not worry," and there is much common sense in it. We often forget it, but it is true that there is no greater hindrance to prudence, to clear-headed judgment, than worry. What friction is to the working of a machine, worry is to the effectiveness of the human mind. We all know that. If your pastor preaches a weak, unconnected discourse once in a while, or if your Sunday-school teacher seems a little dry and commonplace in his remarks, you may have a fair idea that one or the other, or both, have been worrying through the week, and that worry has got into the machinery of the brain and is clogging its even movement. To fret and worry

over our future is really to waste the powers of resistance and endurance which we need to overcome the present. Thousands make shipwreck of present opportunity and privilege by needless worry and anxiety. Therefore science, which is jealous for the present, comes and says, "Do not worry, in nothing be anxious." But it says more. With this negative command, Christ also gives a positive as well. The alternative to worry is not blind inactivity and careless indifference. The mind must rest on something in its besetment by care, and that something is prayer. In everything let your wants be known. Activity in prayer is the apostolic cure for worry. The spirit of prayer is absent largely from modern life. By spirit of prayer I mean that childlike trust and confidence which brings everything to God, which looks for help in small things as well as great, in temporal affairs as well as spiritual, in business and religion. The mistake many make is to confine prayer to one part of our nature, to pray only for the spiritual blessings. Now, we must enlarge its bounds. "In everything," Christ says, and with it we must combine thanksgiving for mercies given. Prayer, then, is the great, conquering force against worry. "Pray without ceasing." Make it a principle of your life to kneel night and morning and ask God's help and guidance in the little as well as the great things, and so shall you be lifted into that region whose

atmosphere is peace, that "peace which passeth all understanding." Then, what is the result? It *shall* guard our hearts like a sentry — such is Paul's idea, peace shall keep sentry over the door of the heart. Where did Paul get that idea? From the Roman sentry to whom night and day he was chained and from whom there was no escape. I say from that constant daily trial Paul learned to think of the unseen guard whose unsleeping vigil kept him from all care and fear. That was the peace of God, and out of his own experience he speaks to us to-day. He shows us how we may know it for ourselves. "Rejoice in the Lord." Let your communion be so sweet that your religion shall be a joy. Be gentle, self-restrained, forbearing towards others. And for yourself, whether beset by business worries, family cares, or secret temptations — do not worry. Do not weaken physical, mental, and spiritual energy by anxiety, but in everything make your desires known to God in prayer, with thanksgiving, and the peace of God *shall* indeed guard your heart until, when the weariness of life is over, you pass to where beyond these voices there is peace.

XII

WHY ATTEND CHURCH?

Jotham did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the Lord. And the people did yet corruptly. — 2 CHRONICLES xxvii. 2.

ONE would naturally infer from these words that Jotham was not a church-going man. In other respects, indeed, he was a good man and a good king. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord: howbeit" (and this apparently was his inconsistency) "he entered not into the temple." Like lots of other people, Jotham was not addicted to the church-going habit; did not feel the need of it, perhaps; felt that he could do his duty just as well without any such ritual as the temple service supplied.

Some of the commentators have, indeed, a different interpretation, into which I do not propose to enter this morning. Jotham's father, King Uzziah, you may remember, entered the holy place of the temple, where none but the priests might go, and for his irreverence was stricken with leprosy before the altar. The shock of that judgment may have affected Jotham so

terribly that ever after he shunned the temple altogether. Its associations were too dreadful, and the result was, as so often happens to-day, that while the father made too much of the temple, — made, in fact, a superstition of it, — the son made too little of the temple, blotted it out of his life altogether and never crossed its threshold.

Here, then, we have a good man, upright in his dealings, who never entered God's house to mingle his prayers and praises with God's people. And what was the result? The very next words in the text tell us: "The people did yet corruptly." That was the penalty. Jotham's example was ruinous to the morals of the nation. Spiritual apathy on his part became moral degradation in its wider issues. Jotham as an individual may have felt himself justified in dispensing with the public worship of God, but when other men weaker than he, more exposed to the grosser temptations of life, temperamentally men of less self-control, followed his example, then the inevitable result was spiritual death, moral corruption, national ruin.

I want to say something on this question of church-going to-day. Personally, I am not a pessimist on this subject. I believe that more thoughtful, intellectual men are going to church in New York to-day than there were ten years ago. On the other hand, I believe that, propor-

tionately, fewer women are attending church than formerly. That is especially so amongst women of leisure and the so-called society woman, for whom Sunday is crowded with social engagements. It is also true largely of the wage-earning woman, who not unnaturally desires the Sabbath for recreation. In the aggregate, of course, there are more women in our churches than men; but, after close observation and comparison with my brother ministers, I make the assertion that the thoughtful men of New York City to-day are on the upward grade in this matter of church attendance. That fact is to be noted and welcomed, and the Christian pulpit, if it is wise, will do everything in its power to attract, by straight, practical, every-day gospel preaching, intellectual men and women to the public services of the church. A church service in which an elaborate ritual is the be-all and end-all will no doubt always attract women, as well as men of an effeminate type, who are still in the kindergarten stage of their intellectual development and are likely to stop there. But it is the gospel, in its terse, concrete application to common life, that will alone successfully attract that type of thoughtful man who seeks the consecration of his intellect more than the tickling of his emotions in the public worship of God.

There is another side to this, and it would be folly to deny it. There are multitudes of good

men like Jotham, living fair, respectable lives, who never cross the threshold of a church; and why should they? they ask. They will tell you contemptuously that the pertinent question is not why men do not go to church, but rather why they go at all. Yet these men give generously to philanthropic enterprises. They are public-spirited. But, so far as religious duty is concerned, they stand apart from the Church of God, utterly indifferent. They will remind you, perhaps, that the worst inconsistencies in life are found amongst the people who attend church, and not amongst those who do not.

It is to this class of people that Jotham speaks. Let us suppose that Jotham felt himself justified in staying away from the temple. "My father's life was ruined by dabbling there with things that did n't concern him," he may have said; "I am going to keep out of it altogether." So he may have argued. But meantime, in ways unseen, by influences of which he never knew, Jotham's example spread ruin through his nation. The people did corruptly. The example of one influential man became contagious in the ruin of many. Jotham forgot, as we forget, that the influence of one bad habit is sufficient to offset the influence of many good habits. It is not our consistency in many things that men judge us by, but our inconsistency in one thing. A man may be a good husband, a kind father, a

generous friend; and yet if the world can detect in that man's life one glaring inconsistency, — as, for example, that he is not square in his money obligations, — then you may be sure that by an unerring instinct the world will judge that man, not by what he is, but by what he is not; not by the many good things he does, but by the one or two glaringly bad things in his life. You may say that is an uncharitable judgment, that it is unfair. Nevertheless, it is this *howbeit* in a man's biography that in nine cases out of ten turns the scale of destiny. "Jotham did that which was right: *howbeit* he entered not the temple. And the people did corruptly."

So in this matter of church attendance. Where would this city be, where would our country be, if every Christian church were closed to-day? Is there any man who, if he had the power, would assume the responsibility of shutting down the churches of this land? Immediately a deterioration of morals would ensue. A tremendous slump in ideals would follow, and all over the land the closed door of the church would be offset by a thousand open doors of nameless degradation. Is that an exaggerated prophecy? Well, let me give you but a single example from the newspapers. One of the papers in this city has been making a personal and exhaustive examination into the political morals of a certain New England State. It has been alleged that politically that

State is rotten, that its votes are regularly bought and sold at every election. A detailed description of each of the most corrupt towns in that State was given, and this was the appalling fact brought out: the worst towns (some of them with a few hundred inhabitants), where bribery was most persistent, where illegal liquor-selling was most rampant, where immorality was most flagrant, were those towns in which there was no resident minister and where no Christian service was regularly held. For instance, in one town known as "darkest Exeter," there were twenty years ago six churches; four of them are in ruins to-day, two are occasionally used, but there is no resident minister. The result is "darkest Exeter," a New England farming town, once peopled by the sturdy sons of the Pilgrim, heir to all the noble qualities of a sturdy race; howbeit they entered not the temple, and the people do corruptly.

Now, my point is this: here is evidence three days old, gathered not from the Philippines or China, not from the far-off West, but from the heart of New England. I say in the face of it, every man who habitually refuses to attend God's house is helping along, to the limit of his personal influence, this degradation of life for the entire country. It does not matter how good a man may be in his own life, or how correct his personal morals may be — Jotham was all that;

his influence, like that of Jotham, in refusing to enter the House of God, is a direct contribution to the corruption of the nation.

To-day I want to plead especially with you, my hearers, who in another week or two will have left the city for the summer. As you love your country, as you believe in God, as you are loyal to Christ, do not live the life of summer atheism. Do not leave behind you in this church your religious responsibilities.

I sometimes think if the angels could look into our empty city churches in the hot midsummer months, they might see, piled around the walls, bags and bundles, marked "Mr. So-and-So's Religion — to be left till called for," or "Mrs. Blank's Church Duties — to be claimed in the fall." Meanwhile, what are Mr. So-and-So and Mrs. Blank and their families doing? Here in the winter you may see them with quite remarkable regularity in their pews, but there in the country for four and even six months in the year church and religion are never thought of. And what is the result? I will not speak of the immediate results upon themselves and their families; for that they must answer before a higher tribunal. But it is the effect on the country districts and the people there that is so disastrous. It is absolutely demoralizing to the country church if the city man presents Sabbath after Sabbath the spectacle of Sunday desecration. If he and his guests

use that day for purposes which make church-going a mockery, is it likely that the young man or woman living in that parish is going to have a particularly high idea of the obligations of the Lord's Day? Still less will the countryman think of his church, if he knows that the city man who so openly scorns God's house in the summer is in the winter a reputable member and perhaps office-bearer in an influential city church. More of the decadence of church-going in the country districts is due to this godless example of summer visitors than any of us are aware. So far from being a blessing, the advent of the city boarder is often a curse to many a quiet country village.

If I may say a further word, do not flock to the fashionable church, wherever you are. We can give you all the fashionable religion you want in New York. Think of the country minister, to whom your coming, your gifts, and your attendance will be like a rift of sunlight in his lonely pastorate. Think of his struggle through the dark winter months, and the discouragements which so often beset the country ministry. Do not make that burden heavier by letting him see you drive past his church door on a Sunday morning, when you might be and ought to be worshipping in that quiet country temple amongst the hills. In certain places summer churches, I am well aware, are necessary — I mean churches open for a month or

two in the year for city people. But for the most part the summer church, with its highly paid city choir and city minister, is an insult to the little sanctuary that all the year through is fighting its battle for the Lord. That is the church you should support. There is where your duty lies. Do not let vulgar snobbishness switch you off to conventicles of fashion that have neither right nor place to be.

The result of this sort of inconsistency of which I have been speaking on a man himself is that it blunts his conscience; it deteriorates his moral and spiritual ideals. If there is a certain habit in my life that I know is unworthy of my profession as a Christian, and if in spite of that knowledge I deliberately cherish it and excuse it, then to that extent I am lowering the standard of honesty and integrity in my own soul. I am cheapening my conscience and degrading the ideal of my manhood. Consciously or unconsciously, I must adapt my inner life to the level of that one inconsistency. However fair to outward appearance the rest of my life may seem, underneath the surface there is a latent insincerity, a dormant hypocrisy, which vitiates the integrity of my character. That is the weakness of so much of our Christianity to-day. It is very largely a religion of compromise. We bring it down to the level of our inconsistency. We adapt our religion to our selfishness and worldliness, and the result is that

many of us who are shining examples in one direction are often glaring warnings in another.

Do we realize, my friends, the tremendous neutralizing power of even one habitual inconsistency? An inconsistency is like the sleeve of a careless schoolboy at his copybook; he smears and blots with his arm what he writes fair with his hand. It is the smeared page that the world looks at and judges us by, and not the care and pains with which we may originally have tried to reproduce in our lives the precepts of the gospel.

So this morning I plead for a more whole-hearted, sincere type of spiritual life, broad as the love of God, tolerant as the spirit of Jesus, and aflame with the zeal of the Holy Ghost. Let us for these summer months resolve this morning that no matter where we may go, we shall be loyal in our attendance upon the worship of God. More than that, every day we live let us seek to be true to Christ in our walk and conversation. An inconsistency, however trivial in itself it may be, is the dry rot of the soul. You may remember how vividly Henry Drummond describes the ravages of the African white ant. "One may never see the insect possibly in the flesh, for it lives underground. But its ravages confront one at every turn. You build your house, perhaps, and for a few months fancy you have pitched on the one solitary site in the country

where there are no white ants. But one day suddenly the door-post totters, and lintel and rafter come down together with a crash. You look at a section of the wrecked timbers and discover that the whole inside is eaten clean away. The apparently solid logs of which the rest of the house is built are now mere cylinders of bark, and through the thickest of them you can push your little finger." It is a vivid picture of the way in which an inconsistency eats out the pith of the soul. To the outward eye everything may remain the same, but the fiber of character has been punctured through and through, until a trivial inconsistency completes the destruction of an immortal soul. Jotham was a good man, howbeit he entered not the House of God, and Jotham's wife, Jotham's children, and Jotham's associates — I mean Jotham here in New York — suffered through his indifference. Some day that one inconsistency, however trivial it may seem to Jotham to-day, will be the switchpoint in his destiny. Let George Herbert's prayer be ours:

"Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee."

XIII

CHRIST'S SECRET OF THE BLESSED LIFE

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. — ACTS xx. 35.

YOU must have noticed how sometimes a single and perhaps chance remark will cast a flood of light on a man's character. As you hear it, you say almost instinctively, "How characteristic of the man!" That, of course, is true of some people more than of others, but in public life especially, you constantly meet with men who seem to be able to condense themselves every now and then into some pithy sentence or striking epigram. It is not simply that such people have the gift of making happy phrases which catch the popular imagination, but their phrases are like tags which reveal the source of their utterance, they are so thoroughly characteristic of the speaker.

That, passing from the human to the divine, was pre-eminently true of our Lord. Think how His words have enriched our thought and speech, and yet remember too how all of His wonderful sayings were the expression of Him-

self and His own experience. They are like windows through which we look into the radiant depths of His spotless soul. Take, for instance, this sentence before us, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." In some respects it is one of the most characteristic, most typical of Christ's words. You feel almost instinctively that in them the heart of Jesus is speaking. There lies the secret of the blessed life as He lived it on our common earth. The deepest note in His joy was that He gave Himself for us, and out of that experience He passes on to you and me this secret of the happy soul, — "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Yet, my friends, in the hard matter-of-fact light of to-day, how many of us are ready to assent to the practical application of these words of Christ to our ordinary business concerns? Do I hear one man say, "These words are very beautiful in a sentimental way, perhaps good enough to quote before a special collection, but in the common affairs of life between man and man they won't work. The business man who is thinking more about the blessedness of giving instead of the stern necessity of getting is going to end in the bankruptcy court." Or I can imagine another man whose heart is in his pocket-book replying to our text something after this fashion: "More blessed to give than receive — so that is your rule of life, is it?"

Well, suppose you try it on with me. You give and I will take, and just see who gets tired first!" And no doubt he will wag his head over his joke and hug himself over his wondrous shrewdness.

Even from his business standpoint, in the light of our ordinary dealings with one another, are these words of Christ so impracticable, after all? I want you to see this morning, my friends, that not only in the gifts of money and the like, but in the deeper relations of the soul, the whole secret of an opulent, well-rounded character, as well as of a blessed life, lies in the recognition of the absolute truthfulness of this *dictum*, that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." For, notice our Saviour is not drawing a sharp contrast here between the rightness of giving and the wrongness of receiving. He does not say anything so foolish as that it is blessed to give but wrong to receive. Jesus Christ was not a fanatic. He lived a wholesome human life, and He knew in His own experience the joy of receiving. The woman who broke the alabaster box of ointment over His feet and of whom He said, "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached, this shall be spoken of as a memorial of her," is the perpetual token of Christ's joy in receiving the gifts of love. What He does say here is simply this, "Between the satisfaction of receiving and the happiness of giving, the balance

of blessedness, the greater weight of joy, is with the giver and not the receiver."

Now, who will dispute that? Look at it in the ordinary relationships of life. To be able to give generously, with unstinted hand, is surely a more agreeable position to be in than to have to receive constantly. The giver for the moment does, as a matter of fact, hold a higher position than the receiver. He may be as poor as the typical church rat, but "in his gift he confers a boon, bestows a favor, rivets an obligation." The receiver is bound by all the decencies and courtesies of life to express, or at least pretend, an obligation for the gift.

Or look at it in this way. What is it that makes the life of the typical pauper so seedy and sordid, so degraded to all self-respect? Simply this, that the chronic pauper has to live his life with an open hand, creeping and cringing all his days, fawning with eager eyes, on the lookout for every tip and dole that comes his way. Surely, there is no more wretched specimen of dwarfed manhood on God's earth, yet the pauper knows every night, as he counts his store, the satisfaction of receiving. Be his gains large or small, — and some of our professional beggars make more than many a wage-earner, — this kind of man lives his life only to receive. Getting is for him the supreme and only business of life, and if a whine will do it, or a pinched face, or

a blind eye, he does not care. All he wants is the blessedness of getting. What is the result? You have a miserable scarecrow of a man, a soul from which almost every shred of sincerity and independence has been stripped away. Such a man loses not only the blessedness of the happy life, but he loses the qualities of manhood that are strong and worthy and self-respecting.

Perhaps you may say to me at this point, "Are you not a little hard upon the poor beggar, a little too severe on the pauper?" Perhaps I am, but I have been speaking in parables. It is not the chronic pauper I am after, but the man and woman in New York City to-day who are neither paupers nor professional beggars, but are, nevertheless, living pauper lives. That is to say, their whole scheme of living is a perpetual game of getting without giving. Like your professional beggar, the problem for them every day is simply how to get a little more, and some of them are not above the tricks of the trade to insure success. For such people, the only joy of life lies in receiving. In the poet's words, "Getting and spending, they lay waste their powers." They come to you with open hand, and this one-sided kind of life is absolutely destructive of character. That is my point. If the daily grind of getting makes the pauper a moral pygmy, spiritually deformed and stunted, then I do not see how the same sort of life can

have any other effect on the business man whose one thought is only to get, but never to give.

Of course the obvious retort to this will be that there is a great moral difference between the man who earns his wage by honest toil and the beggar who gathers his alms by mendicancy. The moral results, you say, cannot be the same, True, but nevertheless the point I make still stands, namely, if I develop only the acquisitive side of my nature, if I call into play only those qualities which are necessary to getting something, I must of necessity be a lop-sided soul. The nobler part of man's nature is not his acquisitive, but his distributive faculties, — if he develops only the first, then he remains to that extent dwarfed in the nobler part of his character.

Let me apply this thought to our children for a moment. Youth is, of course, pre-eminently the receptive period of life. The joy of receiving is the gladness of youth. Its heart and hands are open wide to receive every good gift from God and nature and friends. No one would deny any child the joy of receiving the gifts of love, but, I say in all earnestness, God pity that child who has never felt the joy of giving sometime or other. There is surely no sweeter sight than when at Christmas our children present the little gifts which they have prepared in secret. The loving thought and self-denial which these gifts reveal, while they touch the parent's heart to

the very depths, are, nevertheless, repaid a hundred times over to the child in the joy in which he sees his gift accepted and appreciated. Yet I have heard of homes in this country to-day where the parents are so weak, so foolish and short-sighted, that they have never taught their children this joy of giving. Such children growing up with the one thought of getting, never feeling the sweetness of giving away even a share of their possessions, develop in manhood and womanhood into the grasping, hoarding, self-centered people who are so common amongst us. It is this failure on the part of parents to teach their children in youth the blessedness of giving that is responsible for a great deal of the meanness and avarice in later life.

Let us realize, then, as the first and the most practical lesson of our subject, that to give is an essential, a vital element in a well-balanced character. When I say give, I mean giving cheerfully and giving generously. There are people who dole out their gifts as they might distribute kicks to a dog. They have to be nagged and reminded and bullied, and then, when at last the purse-string is unloosed, it is with a snarl and a growl. To be able to give with cheerfulness, to count it a pleasure to give generously, betokens a quality in character which is beautiful and magnetic. How we are all attracted by the generous-hearted man, not because

we want or expect anything from him, but because his generosity evidences a sweetness of soul and geniality which are good to be near. Therefore, in emphasizing this grace of giving, our Saviour was speaking a word which all of us need to learn to-day. I would not say that this is pre-eminently a selfish age, and yet one would hardly call it a generous age. We were never so rich as we are to-day, and yet the man who has his thousands or his millions is giving to charity to-day pretty much the same amount as he was giving when he had his hundreds. I noticed in the papers a few days ago one most significant paragraph. In ten years the imported luxuries, not necessities, to this country, have risen from \$51,000,000 *per annum* in 1896, to \$125,000,000 in this present year. In 1896 we imported \$7,000,000 worth of diamonds; this year our importations, for diamonds alone, amount to \$42,000,000. No fact could testify more strongly to the enormous surplus wealth of our people and its stupendous increase in such a short period of years. Well, if we can afford it, it is all right, but here is the tragic side of the picture. In these years the charities and benevolences of the American people have shrunk from \$103,000,000 to \$83,000,000. While our expenditures on luxuries are more than doubling, our gifts to charities are steadily decreasing.

Well, Christ tells us that this niggardly spirit

brings its own penalty. It results in a sordid type of manhood; it means a dwarfed kind of people; it means that the American of to-morrow will not be a big, broad-souled, magnetic man. Generosity is the secret of influence, selfishness insulates the soul, and it is better to give than to receive.

There is a higher level of thought and appeal than this. What our Saviour said was not, "It is better," but "It is more blessed, to give than to receive," meaning by that, it is more divine, more Godlike. For what, my friends, is the most glorious feature in the life of our God and Father but this, that He gives us freely and richly all things to enjoy? He fills the eternal years with the bounties of His providence. His gifts are without repentance. His mercies are new every morning. Through all the channels of nature and grace He gives to His children with unstinting hand. More than all that, greater than all His gifts, He gives us Himself. That is the crowning glory of the gospel, — that the Infinite Father of mercy so loved His world that He gave Himself in the gift of His dearly beloved Son. In that divinest gift God has written on the page of human history His own commentary on these words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Therefore, for you and me to live this divine life of giving, imparting ourselves in sympathy

and helpfulness to one another as well as in material gifts to the needy, is to make ourselves like God and to enter into the joy of His fellowship. The giving life links itself to the life of God, and the more we give of ourselves for His sake, the more nearly we approach unto Him. Here, then, is the secret of the blessed life. How often we pray that God will bless us, and, lo, this is the condition of blessing, that we make our lives altars of self-giving rather than thrones of self-pleasing.

Was not that the lesson our poet Lowell taught in his rendering of the ancient legend of Sir Launfal? As Sir Launfal rode forth in all his pomp to seek the Holy Grail, he tossed a coin to an old man at his gates. He dispensed his gift, but not himself. A year later, broken in heart, disappointed in his quest of the Holy Cup, Sir Launfal returned to his castle. The old man still sat at the gate in want, but now the humbled knight dismounted from his horse and took his bowl and filled it with fair water and handed it to the aged pilgrim. And lo, in that gift of himself, of his sympathy and pity, the wooden cup in his hand glowed with an unearthly light, and strains of heavenly music filled the air.

“That is no true alms which the hand can hold.
He gives nothing but worthless gold
Who gives from a sense of duty:

The Holy Supper is kept indeed
In whatso we share with another's need.
Not what we give, but what we share,
For the gift without the giver is bare.
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three, —
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and Me."

Even so, at his own gate, within the shadow of his own home, in a deed of simple loving service, he saw the vision of the Holy Grail. Would you know more of the Christ in your life? Would you feel day by day the touch of His Spirit upon your soul? Then, day by day, not spasmodically, not foolishly, but in loving gifts, realize for yourself that it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive.

I close with one question. We all love our country. We believe in it, love its flag, and surely would count no sacrifice too great to defend its honor. What, then, is the best thing you could wish for your country to-day? Not more prosperity, for we are well-nigh drunk with material wealth. Not more territory, for the vast spaces of this great land are enough to tax our energies. Not more education, for our schools and colleges are scattered over its length and breadth. Surely that which we would crave most for our beloved land would be the development of men and women of Christian character and life. What we desire is to see the new generation growing up in the inspiration of those principles of integrity and

honor and honesty which alone exalt a nation. If that be the wish of every patriotic American to-day, then who will fulfill it but the Lord Jesus Christ by His Gospel and His Spirit? Shall we deny Christ His opportunity? Shall we let our selfishness stand in the way of His Kingdom? In the memory of all His mercies to us, in the light of all our privileges and blessings, in view of the vast problems which are striking at the very heart of our national life, I pray you to-day, by your gifts and prayers, to realize that "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

XIV

THE SECRET OF SELF-CONTROL

He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city. — PROVERBS xvi. 32.

SELF-CONTROL is one of the perfections of the ideal man. It marks that point on the dial-plate of character which denotes the equilibrium of its varied powers. It is, in fact, the perfect poise of a man's mental and moral qualities. What we call a well-balanced nature is an essential condition of self-control. To be self-controlled, therefore, does not necessarily imply the possession of any extraordinary ability. The man possessing this power, looked at from the standpoint of any single talent, may be commonplace, a man of only moderate powers; but he is a force in the community, recognized as such by his associates and not infrequently accepted by them as a leader, simply because his powers, commonplace though they be, are held in perfect mastery, subservient to the one purpose he has in view. There is no warring of interests in his soul, no strife between his will and his emotions, no divorce between his ambitions and his ideals. His nature is in perfect poise — he has learned the secret of self-control.

It might be interesting to ask whether this quality is or is not on the increase in our modern life. Are there more self-controlled people in the world to-day than there used to be? Speaking generally, you might suppose that the nerve tension under which so many of us are forced to live would be destructive of that serenity of soul out of which self-control proceeds. The strain on nerve and brain is so terrific in a city like ours that the problem of self-poise becomes enormously complicated. Even if we do hold ourselves in check in business hours, the tension in doing so is so exacting that the unbending in leisure moments becomes, for many, a rebound into pleasure and dissipation so great that self-control is for the time forgotten. Yet, on the whole, in the more superficial aspects of life at any rate, you might say that the habit of self-restraint is more frequent to-day than at the beginning of the last century. Men do not nowadays give way to these ebullitions of passion, nor indulge in those outbursts of blasphemy, which were not uncommon in the social life of a hundred years ago. Society to-day, in its outward expression at least, is unquestionably more bridled and restrained than it used to be. Yet there is a self-control that lies deeper than in the regions of speech or temper, which dominates the imagination, or reveals itself in the more subtle emotions of the heart and mind, and it is in restraining

ourselves in these more hidden regions of the soul that the true test of character lies. Here, I am afraid, is where so many of us fail to-day. We may control with tolerable success our outward conduct so far as it is revealed in the conventional relations of life; but at the center of the soul, in the inner citadel of character, too often an anarchy of desire takes the place of the settled rule of conscience and principle.

What, then, is the secret by which this great quality may be attained? Does self-control come through inheritance, or is it acquired by the will? In both ways, to a certain extent at least. On the one hand, that balance of nature and poise of soul out of which self-mastery proceeds, may be the priceless heritage of birth. That is, indeed, a great and a rare gift. There are people who enter life with an array of powers so perfectly balanced and adjusted that self-control becomes for them a natural and an easy task. Such natures, in the perfection of their balance, are not swayed by the trivial irritations which so frequently upset others who are less fortunately endowed. Such people do not feel the pressure of worry as others do, and in the strength of their ordered qualities self-mastery becomes a natural sequence. Yet even such natures must pay, do often pay, a certain penalty. The very fact that they are so perfectly balanced and self-poised implies not seldom a certain impassiveness of

soul, a lack of sympathy, a want of sensitiveness to the movements of life around them. They are so completely centered within themselves that they are deficient in receptiveness towards the necessities of life about them. The self-control of a phlegmatic temperament may, indeed, be only another name for selfishness. The self-restraint which comes through sterilizing the soul from the outward world is a pretty poor apology, after all.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that for a very large class of people this problem of self-control is tremendously complicated from their very birth. They come into the world with such an ill-assorted array of faculties, qualities so unevenly adjusted (for which they are in no way responsible), that for them the effort to realize a proper self-control becomes one of the hardest of tasks. One must never forget, indeed, that the lack of self-control may be more of a physical than a moral problem. In many homes one hears of some afflicted soul for whom, with unstrung nerves, the effort at self-restraint is a daily agony. The trial such people cause to others is not half so bitter as the pain they give themselves. While it is no doubt true that the grace of God can work in a sick body just as effectively as in a well body, and as a matter of fact should be independent of nerves or moods, still no true Christian will hesitate to help such

tried and jangled souls with all the sympathy and patience he can. "Ye that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak," says the Apostle, and surely there is no greater infirmity to bear than a bundle of jangled nerves. A little patience, a good deal of fresh air, and a great amount of cheerful faith and courage will do much to relieve the physical hindrances that so often lie in the way of self-control.

Yet this too ought to be said: for such ill-balanced natures Providence has provided a wonderful compensation. The talent or faculty which produces the lack of balance is often so strongly developed, so weighty in itself, that the man is enabled to do special work in that particular sphere, by virtue of that special talent, otherwise impossible. Geniuses, for instance, men of extraordinary talent in one direction, are almost always ill-balanced people. If their gifts lie in the direction of the imagination, then the emotional side of their character is enormously developed at the expense of their reflective side. They are impulsive; they act by inspiration; they are without method, plus, sometimes, a good deal of madness. That, I suppose, is what makes geniuses such interesting people to read about, but so difficult to deal with. One never knows just what they are going to be at next, and as a rule they do not know themselves. The world would be poorer without its geniuses, but the moral law would, on

the whole, be better kept. They lack poise. Their natures are out of balance. They are deficient in self-control.

But geniuses are not the only uncontrolled people in the world. Men and women who are not geniuses, but who ought to be good Christians, are oftentimes sadly lacking in this distinctive quality of the ideal man. It may seem perhaps a little ill-natured to say it, but it would almost seem as if some people were ill-balanced, not because the one talent which they possess was so weighty as because all their other qualities are so light. There is a triviality about them, an airy superficialness that seems to destroy all sense of responsibility. In early life their ambition was to conquer the world; in later life one would be thankful if they could govern themselves.

Even these trivial people do not exhaust the category of the uncontrolled. Men and women who are strong and earnest and unselfish, who occupy positions of responsibility in society, in business, and in the church, are yet frequently woefully deficient in this quality. Such people hold the respect of their associates; their advice is sought from time to time; and yet, put them in a certain critical place, when of all times calm, clear judgment is needed, and in a moment, to use a colloquial expression, "they go all to pieces." Temper, perhaps, is shown just where patience was needed most; hasty action is taken

at the very moment when a little delay would have straightened everything out; words are spoken which ever after are remembered with bitterness; and, in short, things are said and done at that critical juncture, through a lack of proper self-restraint, which lead to endless pain. So, many a home is shattered; family life and family peace are destroyed; friendships are broken; men and women pass out of each other's love and confidence through the failure to exercise a little self-control.

“Forgive you? . . . Oh, of course, dear,
A dozen times a week!
We women were created
Forgiveness but to speak.

“You'd die before you'd hurt me
Intentionally? . . . True.
But it is not, O dearest,
The thing you mean to do —

“It's what you do, unthinking,
That makes the quick tear start;
The tear may be forgotten —
But the hurt stays in the heart.

“And though I may forgive you
A dozen times a day,
Yet each forgiveness wears, dear,
A little love away.

“As the impatient river
Wears out the patient sand,
Or as the fickle ocean
Wears out the faithful land.

“So one day you’ll be grieving,
And chiding me, no doubt,
Because so much forgiving
Has worn a great love out.”

It is not merely in the realm of speech that many of us betray, in the solemn moments of experience, our deficiency in self-mastery. You must have noticed how many of the saddest failures in moral life are due, not to strong, vehement temptation, but simply to a lack of self-control in what otherwise might have been an ordinary commonplace experience. Do I exaggerate when I say that *it is the lack of self-control that turns trivial things into moral tragedies?* A heedless word, a careless look, a chance meeting — how often to the man or woman without self-restraint these things are as doors that swing outward to the wilderness of ruined character and reputation. A little self-control, a mere repression of the appetites, a tightening of the reins of passion at a seemingly chance moment, and many a ruined life had been saved. The shores of human experience are strewn with the wrecks of broken friendship, shattered homes and ruined reputations through just such trivial things magnified into turning-points of destiny. This is what invests the power of self-control with such solemn interest. Without it we are like rudderless ships, dependent only on favoring gales and unrippled seas for our safety and progress.

So long as summer smiles upon the waves, the rudderless ship may laugh at danger, but who can tell how soon the tempest may burst upon the helpless vessel?

Self-control can be gained. It is more often a grace than a gift. Thank God, it can be acquired more effectively than it may be inherited. The hour may come to you and me when it will be more natural to control than to indulge ourselves. Into the joy and strength of that hour we may begin to enter this morning. May God's Holy Spirit grant that even here, out of the broken, restless agony of our ungoverned powers, we may be brought into the rest and peace of complete self-mastery!

Well, what is the secret of its attainment? We need not be reminded here how full biography is of instances of men naturally impetuous and violent, yet who, by resolute purpose and humble dependence on God, realized self-restraint as a natural habit of the soul. And with such people self-control was all the more impressive because of the reserve strength of bridled passion that was held in check behind it. The self-restraint of a cold, impassive temperament is but as candle-light to the sun compared to the self-mastery of a strong, vehement nature. It is the consciousness of that reserve power held in leash, yet sending the pulse of its mighty power into every thought and word, that has enabled men

of this temperament to lead their generation to passion and to power. One has but to turn to the genial, if somewhat hackneyed, pages of Samuel Smiles to learn how men like Washington, William of Orange, Faraday, and others, eminent in their respective spheres, were naturally of fiery temperament, yet through long discipline mastered their passions into perfect self-restraint. What these men did in the face of excitable dispositions, you and I can surely do by the grace of God. You and I must do it, if we are to be in any sense worthy of the name we profess. A Christian who has not the grip of himself, who yields to ungovernable outbursts of temper, who harbors malice and shows spite, dishonors his Lord and brings scandal to his religion. It must not be so, and, thank God, it need not be so. Along three definite lines of spiritual culture the grace of God works out the power of self-control for any man. Recognize these three things in your soul-growth, and the divine Spirit will out of them rear the noble structure of a self-controlled character.

The first element in self-control is self-respect. The preaching of self-respect, in the highest sense, is one of the pressing messages for the life of to-day. Self-conceit, the posing of the soul before the glass of its own complacency, we have in plenty; but of self-respect, the vision of the soul in the light of God's thought, we

have not so much. Self-conceit is the typical sin of the Anglo-Saxon race. I would not say that self-assertiveness is necessarily and altogether a pagan quality, for it lies at the root of a good deal of Anglo-Saxon supremacy; but I do say that self-assertiveness becomes only humble and restrained through Christian self-respect. And what is Christian self-respect? It is a man's recognition of his life as a sacred, inviolable trust from God, and because so precious he dare not trifle with it nor profane it. When a man comes to respect himself and his life as a gift from God, not to do with as he pleases but as God expects, he has taken the first step on the way to self-control. No longer will that man do those things, yield to those tendencies, run riot with those habits, which once were killing the Godlike in the soul. His self-respect puts a curb on the bridle of passion.

“Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.”

Whence does this self-respect come? It buries its roots in the blood-stained soil of Calvary. It blossoms beneath the cross of Jesus. If this life of ours was so precious in the thought of God that to redeem it He gave His only Son as the pledge of its infinite worth, then who are we that we dare trifle with it and throw open its doors to the impious feet of unholy passion?

“Ye are not your own,” says the Apostle; “ye are bought with a price.” “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost? If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy.” Self-respect, in the light of Calvary, is the first element in self-control.

The second element is a sense of personal responsibility. This life of ours is sacred, not only because of what it is in itself, but because of its influence on other lives. A sense of responsibility is indeed the characteristic mark of maturity. A man or woman without it is nothing but a grown-up child who ought not to be allowed to go about alone. Irresponsible people are the curse of society. They are a menace to the moral health of the community. But to realize, even within the narrowest limits, a sense of responsibility towards some authority higher than our own, is to set in motion the forces of self-control. So far as I feel my responsibility, so far I strive to restrain myself. I may claim liberty and license in all other directions, but where my responsibility grips me, I am conscious of a curb upon my words and acts. Take, for instance, a man of violent temper and unbridled tongue, who feels in his home, towards his wife and children, a certain responsibility as husband and father. What happens? Out in the world, in his office or workshop, amongst his associates, he may curse and

swear and make the atmosphere lurid with his blasphemous outbursts, but in the home, where he feels his responsibility, in the presence of his wife and children, he restrains his tongue and temper. His self-control unlocks those rooms of his soul where the sweeter and better elements of his nature dwell.

Suppose that for that man the sense of responsibility enlarges until he feels its influence, not only towards wife and children, or to neighbors and associates, not alone towards those who watch him, but towards God? Then, not merely in the home or in business, not simply in the open places of life where men judge him, but everywhere, in the hidden chambers of his soul and in his private hours, this sense of responsibility towards the unseen God restrains him, and in restraining him from the evil, becomes a positive influence towards the good.

Is not that what so many of us need — a deeper sense of responsibility towards Him with whom we have to do? When you and I realize that Christ has, so to speak, committed His reputation to our hands and called us to be witnesses of His character before men, how much more solemn should our responsibility be, and how much more strongly should it steady us by deepening within our hearts the influence of self-control! It is this consciousness of responsibility towards the unseen God that is the

second element in the attainment of a true self-mastery.

The last step in attaining self-control is the sense of daily fellowship with Jesus Christ. He who would know the true power of self-mastery must live in the atmosphere of his Saviour's life. For where in human history is there a more splendid example of this perfection of character than in the life of Him who "when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not"? The silent Jesus, uncomplaining in the midst of slander, patient in suffering, praying for the forgiveness of His foes even in the moment of death, is for all the ages the ideal, the pattern, of true self-control. The spirit of that life is articulate in the world to-day, and to those of us who in daily communion breathe its atmosphere and dwell beneath the influence of its power, self-control becomes a natural habit. Therefore we may gather up all the practical meaning of this subject in a spiritual paradox, — *self-control comes through self-surrender*. We master ourselves only when we yield ourselves to Jesus Christ.

XV

SON, REMEMBER

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. — LUKE xvi. 25.

THERE is no question more keenly discussed by religious thinking people in these days than the question of future punishment, — punishment in a world to come. You may have noticed that that discussion has changed somewhat in these recent years. In earlier times the question was as to the length of this future punishment, whether it was eternal or no, but now the question asked is whether there is punishment at all for the deeds done in the body. We are constantly hearing it asked by people whether it is consistent with a God of love and mercy to punish in a life to come His creatures who have sinned in this life. We are asked whether there can be any profit or pleasure in condemning poor, weak, struggling human souls to torment and anguish in a world beyond the tomb. And so, as a result, we have in these days what men call a gospel of good-will, in which all sense of sin, all

conscience, all fear of God, has been eliminated; in which the cross with its awful sacrifice becomes a mere spectacular thing in history, and not, as Scripture tells us, the ground of the world's hope and the source of the world's immortal life. Into all that question of future punishment I am not going to enter, but this parable before us shows our Saviour on one of the few occasions of his ministry dealing with the problem of future punishment or retribution. Now, let us see what truth our Saviour has to cast upon this question in the light of the teaching of this parable. Wherein lies the kernel, the heart, of this parable? You find the heart of the Saviour's teaching here in these two words, "Son, remember." There, in brief, solemn compass, you have gathered up the whole pith and meaning of this strange, weird story of a rich man who was clothed in purple, and a poor man who was covered with sores, — "Son, remember!" These, the first words spoken to an immortal soul after it had just crossed the threshold of the eternal world, teach us that retribution in that world will be so just that even the soul itself of the sinner will admit its justice in the light of a reawakened memory. In other words, our Saviour teaches us here that inhumanity, selfishness, and sin in this world will not only be punished in that world — there is punishment — but that punishment will be so righteous that even the sinner himself will admit its

righteousness by remembering what lies behind. Memory will be the vindicator, in the hands of God, of the righteousness of retribution. You notice that Christ emphasizes this solemn thought in a series of contrasted tableaux. He depicts this in a spiritual drama in which two characters are thrown into vivid contrast, — one a rich man, so wealthy that his riches overflowed into extravagance and luxury; the other a poor man, so poor that his poverty is positively loathsome to read about.

Yet notice that nothing is imputed wrong, positively base, in regard to the rich man's wealth. It is not hinted that he had come by his riches through dishonest or ignoble means; it is not suggested that he trampled the poor or persecuted the widow. Wherein lies the sin of this rich man? Simply in neglect. His inhumanity is revealed not so much in what he does as in what he does not, — in his omission to realize the claims of the poor, the weak, and the helpless around him. He does not trample them. He does not persecute Lazarus at his gate; he simply leaves him alone; he simply unshoulders, if I may say so, the responsibility of weaker society upon him. Therein, says our Saviour, lies the inhumanity that works out its retribution in a world to come.

Look at the poor man. The character of the rich man has been drawn in this line of conduct pursued by him, — mere neglectful selfishness.

The character of the poor man is delineated in the name with which Christ identifies him. In all the great Scripture portrait gallery of our Saviour's parables the only figure that appears that receives the dignity of a name is the poorest, the humblest, and the most abject of them all.

We would like to know the name of the Prodigal Son, to embalm in memory that of the Good Samaritan, and no name is given; but this poor, miserable beggar that lay at the gates of the rich man's palace is immortalized by the name of Lazarus, "God my helper." Undoubtedly our Saviour wished to emphasize the thought that faith in God through poverty and through neglect is vindicated at last in the future of God's eternity. Undoubtedly we are taught here that the poor man who does not curse his fate, who does not denounce those around him, but puts his trust in God, receives justice at last.

Then there is the contrast, and the scene changes. From time we go into eternity, to a rich man now in torment and a poor man in bliss. Let me say here that our Saviour in describing the future world has used a series of expressions, of phrases, that were common on the lips of the Jews at the time in which he preached, but which we are not to take literally. I think one of the mistakes in interpreting this parable has been to assume that the expressions of the fire, the burning thirst, the impassable gulf, Abraham's bosom,

and the like, are all literal descriptions of heaven and hell. It has been assumed that this parable is a kind of spiritual geography of the two worlds beyond the tomb. Nothing of the kind. Abraham's bosom, being in hell, the great gulf fixed, and the like, were common phrases used by the Jews in our Saviour's time and used by him to illustrate the truth — the truth for all time — that there is in the world to come a reversal of position; that inhumanity and selfishness are punished, and faith in God, however humbly placed, is lifted out into the joy of eternal life.

Now, to come back to the thought, the rich man is told to see the righteousness of his retribution in the light of his own memory, — "Son, remember," — and the lesson for us is this: the place of memory in the world to come. The old Canon Leighton used to tell a story of a certain Indian officer who had seen a good deal of service and taken an active share in many of the memorable struggles of the Indian mutiny. Towards the close of life this old veteran had retired to die, and one day he was narrating to a group of his friends some of the more interesting and exciting events of his past career, and led on by their interest and sympathy he was induced to traverse long past years, and as he related encounters and hairbreadth escapes, personal encounters, and marches, since interwoven into the terrible record of the Indian mutiny, their interest grew keener

and more exacting. Finally the old veteran paused for a moment; then he said, "But, friends, I expect to see something much more exciting than anything I have yet narrated." Being a man over seventy, retired from the service, his listeners failed to catch his meaning and asked what he meant. He paused again, and then said in an undertone, "I mean in the first five minutes after death." The first five minutes after death, friends, a period into which each one of us shall yet pass, — a period in which you and I will have our part in days not far distant. Our text reminds us that in these first five minutes the first words spoken to a soul were, "Son, remember!" The most active power in the human soul will be the memory sweeping behind and seeing its position then in the light of what had gone before. You remember how terribly that thought preyed upon the mind of the heathen world. In their dreams of an elysium beyond the tomb, an elysium of perfect, unclouded bliss, there was always one dark shadow, — this power of memory to come in and disfigure and break the joy by the remembrance of sorrow, of pain and struggle; and so to obviate any such possibility, to insure the perfect bliss of this elysium beyond death, the old Greek poets taught that each soul had to pass first through the dark waters of Lethe, and there, bathed in the turgid tide of that dark stream of forgetfulness, the soul was

ready to enter into its bliss. Not "Remember," but "Son, forget" were to the heathen mind the first words spoken to the immortal spirit that had passed out of death into eternity.

Now, would that be possible? A poetic thought, but surely not philosophically true, for if there be no memory in that world to come, how are you and I to identify ourselves? Memory! Why, that is the very link in the chain of events that enables a man to be sure of himself. How do I know that I who speak am the preacher that spoke here a year ago, but by the power of memory, and if there be no memory in that world beyond, how shall we know ourselves? There can be no personal identification, no reunion of severed friendships, no bringing together of lost ones near and dear in joyous reunion, unless the Father of infinite mercy can say to the pilgrims who arrive through the gates of death, "Son, daughter, remember!"

It is because memory will be there as an attendant angel that the mother shall see the child and know the little one she lost years before. It is because memory will be active in these first five minutes after death that hands will be clasped in these realms of light and we shall know each other once again. On the other hand, who can picture the agony when memory comes in that world beyond to be the instrument of remorse, the whip and scourge of an awakened conscience,

when the words of the poet are realized as he cries,

“Remembrance with all her busy train
Swells at my breast and turns the past to pain.”

We need not live a long life to realize this power of memory as the instrument of remorse, as it was for this rich fool in the parable.

Let me quote again the words of a man who died in the early prime of manhood, with the promise of life before him, when not memory but hope should be uppermost; at thirty-seven years of age, what is the cry of this man?

“Will no remorse, will no decay,
Oh, memory, soothe thee into peace,
When life is ebbing fast away?
Will not thy hungry vultures cease?”

“So to the heart untamed would cling
The memory of an evil thing
In life’s departing hour.”

It is the same thought that Milton has expressed in his immortal, oft quoted words, “Which way I fly is hell: myself am hell.” Oh, memory, in the hands of conscience awakened too late, what will this vision of memory then in these five minutes after death bring to us? What will be its nature?

In the first place, it will be a discriminating power. Memory, then, freed from the weakness

of the flesh, from the trammels of the body, will be able in these first five minutes to see life in its separate parts, each linked to the other by the unbroken chain of cause and effect. It was so with this rich man of the story. He realized then, when the words were spoken, "Son, remember," the neglect, the selfishness pampered in luxury in the world of time, were links in the chain in his misery in the world of eternity. So for you and for me it is no fiction, it is no pulpit rhetoric, it is sober fact, that in these first five minutes after death that great chain of cause and effect, link upon link, that runs in the unbroken chain from the cradle to the grave, will be seen then, as we have never seen it in the past, by the discriminating power of memory. Things that seemed trivial at the moment will be seen then to have been the turning-points of history. We shall see how acts were hardened into habit, habit crystallized into character; we shall not only be able to spell out our destiny upon the finished web of life, but we shall see what different threads were woven into the woof to form the different letters of that destiny.

In this discriminating power of memory in the world to come I find sufficient to explain the joy of heaven or the torments of hell. If life be lived towards God, then we shall remember how the Divine mercy ran like a thread of gold through all our experience. We shall see how the Divine

love broke down our selfishness and ordered struggle, sorrow, temptation, aye, even backsliding, to be instruments and means of grace. But if, on the other hand, life be selfish, if life have in it no higher motive, then in answer to that command, "Son, remember," we shall see how, when the Divine Spirit was pleading most earnestly, our hearts were hardest, how, when the Divine mercy was around us, we turned aside in defiant refusal. In these words, I repeat, "Son, remember," you have the explanation of what a lost world must mean. I need picture no lurid flames of some physical, material hell; I need invent no theories of eternal wrath dragging the sinner to his doom. In this awakening of memory, to remember life as it might have been and to see it as it is; to see ourselves not only as we are, but as we came to be; to see how the wrongs we did ourselves were also bringing ruin to others; — to realize all that, friends, in the power of a discriminating memory, awakened, aroused beyond the veil, I find the doom — doom enough — spoken to every unrepentant soul when these words are uttered, "Son, remember."

Then, just once more, this memory in the world to come will not only be discriminating, but for the believer, perhaps, for those who trust Christ, it will be a transfiguring memory. There are some, perhaps, who are saying, "It would be no heaven for me if I could not forget some things

in my life. There are sorrows, there are experiences in my past, which, unless God will give me grace and strength to forget, to obliterate, I cannot know the peace of an eternal future." There must be obliteration, you say, for you if there is to be perfect joy hereafter. Well, will that be so? I do not wish to dogmatize, but think of it in this way: take the sorrow, the anguish of Calvary; was there ever deeper sorrow in human history than that which our Saviour experienced when He cried, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Will He forget those sorrows in the world to come? "Behold," says John, "I saw in the midst of the throne a lamb, as it had been slain." Still upon Jesus Christ in heaven the wounds of Calvary appear, but the wounds are not those of a victim but a conqueror, the marks of triumph. The Lamb is there, but it is the Lamb transfigured. And so for you and me the past will not be obliterated; we shall remember, but remembering see only the transfiguration of a finished purpose of love.

We shall see, then, looking at life as a whole, how what seemed to us here nothing but heart-break was, after all, the expression of a Father's love. "Son, remember," he will say in that bright morning to you, and that which to remember brings tears to your eyes now will bring joy and gladness then. I remember once standing in the gray morning on a Scottish moorland in a

September day. How bleak everything looked; the gray granite boulders cold and forbidding; in the gray light the loch beyond shivered in the cold air of the dawn upon it, and the mountain tops still behind were grim and somber with the clouds of night upon them; but, lo, suddenly and ever more quickly the sun rose, and what a transformation! These boulders were ruddy and warm in the new light, gleaming like blocks of gold hewn from the quarries of eternity. The loch smiled as it leaped up to kiss the dawn and glowed rosy with the blush of the advent of the coming day. The mountains beyond seemed to tremble in the embrace of the warm sunlight. All was still the same, only light transfigured what was there before. So when the Sun of righteousness arises in eternity, it will not be to add anything to the past, but these dark hours will be transfigured as we remember them in the light of eternity.

Just one more thought. This memory will be active memory. How quickly we manage to forget here! There will be no forgetfulness there, for memory will have its untrammelled work of outlook back over the past. There is no future for the soul that has lost hope. Scientists tell us of the persistence of vision by which the eye still retains the object of light even after it has been removed from before it, and so, even when the scenes of life have passed away, remembrance will abide.

You and I are making these memories for eternity. We are writing the remembrances that will give character to that life beyond, — “Son, remember!” — nothing forgotten! You may bury the past now, but you only bury it as the murderer buries his victim’s corpse; some day, not remembering, he stands upon the grave and the skeleton is revealed. There is no forgetfulness. What memories are we making? At our doors are the helpless, the needy; at the door of every heart is Jesus Christ. Let our prayer be the prayer of the dying penitent, “Lord, remember me!” and as He remembers us in this hour of grace, we shall remember Him in that first five moments of eternity; we shall remember the cross that saved, the love that redeemed, and the memory of eternity will be the memory of joy, because transfigured by the love of Christ.

XVI

TWO PENNIES, OR THE SOMETHING EXTRA

And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. —
LUKE x. 35.

TWO pennies, even in that primitive age, was not an extravagant amount to invest in a sick man's recovery at a public inn. But it was probably all that the Good Samaritan had; and when to this gift he added the promise that he would pay whatever more was needed, it represented the completion of a perfect deed of love. In that extra gift of the two pennies, with the promise of more, Christ has added the touch of an exquisite finish to this story of immortal beauty.

It is this "something extra" in the ministry of love and life that I want to speak of, because it is the very essence of the gospel. The gospel of Christlike helpfulness reveals itself by going just a little bit farther and doing just a little more than the world expects. It was, of course, a

beautiful thing for the Good Samaritan to go to the wounded man in the ditch, pouring oil and wine into his gaping wounds and then carrying him to a place of safety and shelter. I dare say to ninety-nine per cent of the people who read their Bibles that was all that the Good Samaritan did. At any rate, ninety-nine per cent of us would say that in doing that the Good Samaritan showed the spirit of true compassion. But not so the man himself. Manifestly he was an artist in philanthropy. In the thought of Jesus the real, the essential, beauty of this man's act lay not so much in doing what the instincts of common humanity should have prompted him to do as in the fact that when he had done all that, "on the morrow," when the feelings had had time to cool off, this man's love blossomed into new thoughtfulness, and in the extra gift of the two pennies and the promise of more he crowned his act with immortal completeness.

I. So the first thought our text impresses is this, — the thoughtfulness of love in providing for unexpected contingencies. The two pennies imply a certain thoughtfulness in this man's ministry of compassion. "Whatsoever thou spendest more I will repay" — with these words the Good Samaritan passes out of our story. He starts on his journey, but he carries in his heart a burden of responsibility. He is not through with that battered waif whom he has rescued.

“Out of sight” is not “out of mind” with him. There is something extra in this man’s soul, and because of that, he makes provision for the future.

It is here that so much of our modern charity and philanthropy fails. It stops short at the two pennies. We may, indeed, subscribe our two pennies, — an amazing number of people do that, — but the two pennies do not mean for us what they meant for the Good Samaritan, any more than the Widow’s mite means the same to the modern millionaire when he deposits it in the treasury of the temple. In other words, a great deal of modern charity lacks the added touch, the something extra, of a thoughtful love. We make our contributions, dole out our alms, and that is the end of it. We do not trouble ourselves to get acquainted with the facts, and we are supremely indifferent as to the results. “Take it,” we say; “here is all I can give; do not trouble me any more.” Without that element of thoughtfulness charity and benevolence become simply mechanical, and gifts degenerate into mere statistics. This mechanical, unthoughtful element in modern philanthropy is degrading alike to the giver and the recipient. Do you suppose the Good Samaritan would be remembered with blessing if these two pennies were the expression of his whole sense of responsibility, instead of being, as they were, the overflow of a thoughtful love that

planned for the future as well as thought of the present? The soul goes out of philanthropy when the thoughtfulness of a loving heart is missing. We have heard a great deal about "tainted money" in connection with Foreign Missions. Personally, I would rather a hundred times over have the "tainted dollar" of a poor outcast on the streets, with a heart of repentance and love back of it, than the spotless gift of an orthodox saint who threw it at me as he would throw a bone to a dog.

It is not only in our charities that this "something extra" of love should reveal itself. Ought it not to mark our relations to one another in the home? Does not the sweetness of a family circle depend, after all, upon the added touch which only a thoughtful love can supply? A good deal of family love becomes vulgar because it does not think. They say "Love is blind"; too often it is thoughtless as well. It wounds unthinkingly the hearts it cherishes most. Of course, we do the things expected of us in the home, go through the regular routine of affection, but so often family life lacks the refinement, the courtesy, the considerateness of one another's feelings, and the forbearance towards one another which the extra two pennies symbolize. I am perfectly certain that the investment of the two pennies of a thoughtful love in the family would mean the beautifying of a

great many homes. You see the parable. The two pennies in themselves did not amount to so very much, but when the two pennies of the Good Samaritan were the expression of his thoughtful love they meant everything. The investment of a little thoughtfulness in the way of forbearance and considerateness in family life does not entail much sacrifice, but the expression of it may mean everything.

I think this Good Samaritan was a man with an imagination. "On the morrow" — and who knows how busy his imagination had been all the previous night in picturing this poor victim's helplessness! He saw him perhaps, in fancy, after he was recovered, again cast out by the roadside to beg or to die; he pictured the poor wretch's misery and helplessness without a friend. He saw this man's last condition worse than his first, and in imagining the worst the Good Samaritan provided for the best. That is the right kind of optimist. The true optimist is not he who sees only the bright side, but rather he who having seen the possibility of the worst believes in the realization of the best. It is this quality of imagination in the ministry of love that so often is the "something extra" that beautifies it. Imagination will oftentimes discover the little opportunities through which the thoughtful love will express itself. You remember that story of Daniel Webster. Going home one afternoon

after trying an arduous case in the courts, he stopped to see his daughter, Mrs. Appleton, who was dying. As he entered the room, she looked up and said, "Father, why are you out on so cold a day as this without your overcoat?" The great lawyer left the room with a sob, exclaiming, "Dying, yet she thinks of me." It was the added touch of a considerate love that made that remark so precious to the father's heart.

So too in our business life. Is there not room in the great commercial and industrial world for this "something extra" of a thoughtful considerateness? The genial ministry of the two pennies would mean a great deal in the drudgery of many a tired worker's life in this great city. Old Scrooge was not dishonest, he was only mean, and he was mean because he did not believe in the investment of the two pennies in the hard life of his clerk. Business life, almost of necessity, becomes mechanical in its inexorable demands. An employer may truly and sincerely say that he cannot afford to relax the hard and fast rules of business for those in his employment, because there will always be some mean-spirited, ungrateful men, who will not only take a base advantage of his kindness, but throw it in his face. I doubt not that many an employee will say honestly and sincerely that if he should do more than his bond demands, go beyond the letter of his contract, he would receive no thanks

for his pains, and possibly be only censured for his interference. Yet, even so, there must be a time in front of us when the cold, pitiless relationships at present existing between the employer and the employee will come to an end, and when the employee will not be content with a scamped day's work and an unfinished job, and when the employer will not be satisfied with giving the least possible amount to defray his obligations to those in his service. Surely there will spring up a spirit of mutual confidence and considerateness that will transfigure business relations. Even so to-day, as we recognize the seeming hopelessness of our economic conditions, surely, as followers of Christ, we can believe that there is room for the investment of the two pennies of the Good Samaritan's love.

II. These two pennies illustrate the *overflow* of love as well as its thoughtfulness. Suppose the Good Samaritan had been told that all his loving foresight was unnecessary? Suppose the landlord had said, "I will take care of this poor creature, I will provide for his bed and board until he is well"? Do you suppose that the Good Samaritan would have stopped there? The two pennies represented the overflow of a great, big heart, which must find for itself channels of helpfulness. The motto of this man's life was not, "How little can I do?" but "How much can I do?" and that is the spirit which saves the

world. It is the prodigality of love that redeems men. Unless the heart overflows in its helpfulness, it will never fructify stunted and starved lives.

Yet how little of this overflow of love we have to-day! How thin and shallow the stream of our modern charities runs! I wish that an artist would paint for me the picture of a great river representing the stream of wealth and material prosperity which has swept through the country during the past year. What an impressive sight it would be! Upon the bosom of that vast stream would be depicted the great vessels symbolizing the industries, the commercial powers of the nation. Then, alongside of this, if it were possible, I would like the artist to paint another stream representing the gifts toward benevolences during the same period. I think he would tell me that if he were to paint the second river in mathematical proportions to the first, it would be useless, for it would be practically invisible to the naked eye! The stream of our charity represents almost nothing of the overflow of a great love.

Well, is that God's way? God has redeemed the world through the overflow of a love that swept all barriers from its course. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In the overflow of the love of God the world is redeemed.

And to this great redemption from sin into life has not God's overflowing love added, in a thousand ways, the blessed ministry of the two pennies? "He that spared not His own Son," says the Apostle, speaking out of an experience that had been filled by the overflow of God's great love, "how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?" "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," said Jesus, "and all these things shall be added unto you." Always there is the "something added," the ministry of an extra bounty in the infinite compassion of Him who is for all mankind the Good Samaritan to human need.

Yet how can you or I expect the blessings of this overflow of the Divine love if we are unwilling to let it stream through our lives in the ministry of helpfulness to others, and in the investment of Christlike sympathy to those who lie helpless in our path? The barrier of human selfishness is too often a rock against which the torrent of the Divine love is thrown backward from the channel of human necessity.

III. The two pennies symbolize, in the last place, the coronation of love, its triumph in the ministry of compassion. This gift implied that the Good Samaritan had rounded out his deed of love. This robber's victim was his, and he was not done with him until he had seen him thoroughly saved. It may be they never met again. When the Good Samaritan returned that

way once more to pay the bill, it may be that the "man amongst thieves" was gone. "Yes," said the landlord, "he left here a couple of weeks ago, but he wanted me to tell you that he thanked you for your kindness." So, perhaps, the man passed out of the Good Samaritan's life. Yet I picture another scene in heaven, when these two men came together before the throne of Eternal Life, and I hear the "man amongst thieves" say to the Good Samaritan: "Under God I owed everything to you in the time of my necessity. It was the two pennies which you left that brought solace to my heart in the days when I lay without a friend." Is not that the beauty of all true service? Too often we are compelled to begin a ministry of love and leave it to others to finish. Frequently our deeds of charity are uncrowned; they are but fragmentary attempts to do kindness without the harvest of completed success. Yet is there any joy that can compare with this, — to feel that some rescued soul is ours through and through, that under God we have begun and continued and completed a good work? When, for instance, a man becomes interested in some drunken associate and through all his degradation, in spite of his repeated fallings and failures, stands by him till he has placed him safe upon his feet, that man is repeating the investment of the Good Samaritan when he left the two pennies, the symbol of a triumphant love.

Henry Drummond used to tell of a student in Edinburgh University whose nights were spent in drunken orgies. Yet he was a man worth saving. He was a noted athlete in the 'varsity sports, but his manhood was running to waste through dissipation. But one of Drummond's converts, a young refined student, went to this man and asked permission to share his room. For six months the two men lived together, an incongruous couple. The young man put up with the uncleanness and coarseness of his comrade, sat up for him nights, gave him the ministry of Christian friendship, and in the end, by the grace of God, he saved him. That drunken medical student became one of Drummond's strongest workers in the University. Later he went to South Africa, a consecrated Christian man, redeemed, but how? Through the investment of the two pennies by a devoted soul, resolved to save one man through and through for the service of Christ.

That is a ministry possible for the humblest Christian. We may not sway the multitude, nor add to the census of the churches; but, thank God, in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, by the service of daily faithfulness and individual patience, we may save one soul through and through, and so crown our life with that love that "suffers long and is kind, that hopeth all things, beareth all things," until it wins its trophy for Christ.

XVII

HAS CHRISTIANITY A MESSAGE TO A SCIENTIFIC AGE?

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away. — MATTHEW xxiv. 35.

I WANT to speak of the changed atmosphere in which the religion of Christ finds itself in our modern world, and to ask this question, Is the message of Christianity as applicable to the changed conditions of this twentieth century as it was to those of the first century of its birth? In our text you notice that Christ makes that stupendous claim for His gospel. Above and beyond the passing pageant of this world, He claimed for His message an eternal and unchanging quality, which no shock of time could weaken or destroy. Is that claim true? Can we vindicate it in the light of modern thought? Is this old religion of ours, which came into being in the quiet, simple life of Galilee nineteen centuries ago, a living word for the busy, thronging life of the modern world?

Perhaps that question may become just a little clearer if I remind you here, in one single word,

of the vital point of distinction between Christ's age and our age. The first century of our era was essentially unscientific; the twentieth century is profoundly scientific. And the question which many thoughtful men and women are asking to-day is just this, Can Christianity, born in an unscientific age, continue to exist in an age of science? There is, as we know, no sneer so common on the lips of a certain type of man to-day as that Christianity is "played out"; that it has no specific message for the New Heavens and the New Earth which the modern scientific spirit has created. "In fifty years from now," one of these men said only recently, "the Christianity of Christ will be extinct."

Let us think, then, of one or two of the profound changes which science has undoubtedly wrought in our modern ways of thinking, and then let us see frankly whether these changes are so great that they have outlived the message of Jesus.

In the first place, to the men of Christ's day, and for thirteen centuries after, this world was regarded as the center of the universe. It was the big thing in the universe, and the other worlds around it in space were simply regarded as candlelights to illumine the firmament. According to the ideas of that time this earth of ours was conceived of as a flat, stationary surface, suspended in space, above which was heaven, in

the center of which was the throne of God. So the ancient world thought of this earth, and the ascension of a physical body right up from this flat, stationary surface to the very throne of God was a simple and easy conception. When, for instance, the sacred writer told the story of Elijah's ascension in a chariot of fire, he no doubt thought of that ascension as a journey straight upwards through the clouds, that, in a few hours at longest, would bring Elijah to the right hand of God. He did not know, as we do, that seven miles above our atmosphere no physical body could exist for a moment, but would fall to pieces, and, by the law of gravitation, return in shattered fragments to the earth from which it came. By the modern mind the Translation of Elijah must be accepted either as a stupendous miracle or an allegorical description of a good man's death. To-day, think of the marvellous change which science has wrought in our conception of the earth. Instead of being the center of the universe, this little earth is now known to be nothing but a tiny, insignificant speck amongst myriads of other worlds, many of them thousands of times larger than ours. Instead of being a flat, stationary surface, our earth is now known to be whirling through space at the terrific speed of eighteen and one half miles a second, — quicker than any motion that man has invented. If the throne of God be regarded as

no farther away than the Pleiades, as some orthodox divines once conceived, it would take a physical body, travelling at the incredible rate of two thousand miles a day, not less than one hundred and fifty million years to reach that particular spot in space!

That, then, is one profound change in the view of the world which the progress of science has produced. Yet does it disturb our faith to-day? Does it weaken the sublime moral standards of the Sermon on the Mount? Does it strip the Cross of its awful majesty of self-sacrificing love? Unquestionably, when this new view was first suggested by men like Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, the Church of their day branded them as heretics and infidels. I need not quote here the pitiful story of Galileo's long martyrdom, — how, summoned by a conclave of cardinals to recant what they denounced "as damnable and detestable heresy," namely, "that this earth moves through space," Galileo was imprisoned for life, with the additional punishment that once a week he should repeat the seven penitential Psalms as an evidence of his guilt! Yet here is the wonderful and impressive fact. All these pioneers of science, the men who helped to bring about this changed idea of the earth and the heavens above, were not atheists, but, on the contrary, loyal and devoted Christians. Copernicus, a faithful parish priest, who, when his book that was to make a

new epoch in human thought was placed in his dying hands, could only murmur, "Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace"; Kepler, who was so profoundly religious that, as he traced the movements of the heavenly bodies, he exclaimed, "O God, I only think Thy thoughts after Thee"; Galileo, an unquestioning believer in Jesus Christ; Isaac Newton, with the simple faith of a little child,—all of them Christian believers to the last, yet in the name of science they revolutionized the old conception of the world in which Christianity was born. In one deep sense it may indeed be said "that the heavens and earth of Christ's day have passed away," and yet His words still remain with their appeal to the deepest instincts of the soul.

There is another profound change in our thought of the world to-day which science has wrought. If you look at your reference Bible, you will find at the top of the first column of references, at the beginning of Genesis, the year 4004 B. C. given as the date of the creation of our world. According to that theory, which existed until about sixty years ago, and which every orthodox believer in the Bible accepted, our earth at this present moment is about six thousand years old. But need I tell you how geology and the kindred sciences have annihilated that theory completely? Instead of being six thousand years old, scientists like Lord Kelvin are to-day telling

us that the world is not less than seventy million years old, and some of them go so far as two hundred millions of years! Moreover, that later science, archæology, has shown us that man himself was in a high state of civilization, that printing was in existence, that merchant galleys sailed the Mediterranean, ten thousand years ago, and that the first traces of life itself go back at least one hundred thousand years.

Or, again, take the sublime Hymn of Creation in the first chapter of Genesis. According to that story, the world was created in six days. Not so many years ago the Church fought vehemently for the literal interpretation of these six days. Strangely enough, the first men to point out the absolute impossibility of such a story were not infidels, but, on the contrary, devout Christians, members of the Church, men like Hugh Miller and others, who showed that from the testimony of the rocks, between the formation of the earth itself and the first appearance of life, millions of years must have intervened, and that therefore the story of Genesis must be reverently accepted as a beautiful poem, enshrining the great truth of a Divine Creator, but not giving, or even professing to give, an historic or scientific account of the creation of the world. Well, what of it? Does this new view of the creation, in the light of modern science, weaken the message of Jesus Christ to mankind? Does the changed con-

ception of the age of the earth invalidate man's spiritual need of the gospel? The heavens and the earth, as described in the Book of Genesis, have passed away, but His words abide to meet the yearnings of immortal souls.

The third great change which science has produced in our thought of the world is that presented by the modern doctrine of evolution. The year 1859, in which Darwin first published his famous "Origin of Species," will rank as one of the memorable epoch-making years in the history of human progress. Yet, when that new doctrine of Darwin's first appeared, the Church, as in the days of Copernicus and Galileo, as in the later days of Hugh Miller and Charles Lyell, attacked Darwin and his associates vehemently on behalf of what orthodox Christians regarded as the literal teaching of Scripture. As Copernicus and Galileo were accused of weakening the authority of the Bible by their new theories, as Miller and Lyell were denounced as enemies of Scripture by their new theories, so Darwin was called the foe of Christianity and the ruthless destroyer of the veracity of Scripture, although in that year, 1859, Darwin was still a believer in God. But what happened? The bitter controversies of 1859, which waged for nearly twenty years, are long since past. Ministers do not now preach series of sermons branding evolution as a theory of the evil one. Even

so orthodox an authority as President McCosh of Princeton wrote a book entitled "The Religious Aspect of Evolution." Henry Drummond, earnest Christian as he was, has endorsed it in his "Ascent of Man." John Fiske, in describing his own return to faith, did so in his last book, "Through Nature to God," by accepting the theory of evolution. In a word, once more the new view of science has prevailed, but with what result? Christianity still persists. The words of Christ still carry their message of life to needy souls, and though the old heavens and earth, as our fathers conceived them, have passed away before the doctrine of evolution, Christ's words still abide, unshaken and unmoved, in their supreme authority.

Now, in the light of all this, we are ready to face the question, — and a profoundly important question it is, — Wherein lies the persistence of the Christian message so that it survives all change? What is it that gives to the words of Christ their abiding authority, so that while our conceptions of this world are modified with each passing age, these divine words still appeal, with their ancient power, to the heart and conscience of mankind? The answer to that question, I am persuaded, must be found, and can only be found, in the *unique personality of Jesus Christ Himself*. That, I repeat, is the fundamental and unchanging factor in our Christian

faith, the supreme and absolute uniqueness of its Founder.

There are, it has been said, two things which account for the greatness of a great man: first, the extent of his influence on mankind; and, secondly, the purity and dignity of his character. Apply both of these tests to Jesus, and He stands forth supreme amongst men. Let me quote here some wonderfully striking tributes to this unique quality in Christ's character, made, not by followers of His own, but by men who are not only not Christians, but, on the contrary, were content to be known as agnostics.

There is the testimony¹ of Mr. Lecky, the historian, in his memorable "History of European Morals": "The three short years of the active life of Jesus have done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists."

There is the testimony¹ of John Stuart Mill, a man who wandered far from Christian faith: "It is no use to say that the Christ of the Gospels is not historical, and that we know not how much has been added to His words by the traditions of His followers, "for," asks Mill, "who is capable of inventing the sayings of Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels?"

¹ Quoted by Dr. Carnegie Simpson in "The Fact of Christ."

There is the remarkable testimony given in the recently published "Jewish Religious Cyclopedia," a work issued under the authority of the Hebrew Church in Europe and America. In the article on "Christianity" Rabbi Kaufman Kohler, President of the Hebrew Union College, says that "Christianity, following the matchless ideal of its Christ, redeemed the despised outcast and ennobled suffering. It checked infanticide and founded asylums for the young; it removed the curse of slavery by making the humblest bondsman proud of being a child of God; it fought against the cruelties of the arena; it invested the home with purity and proclaimed the value of each human soul as a treasure in the eyes of God; and it so leavened the great masses of the empire as to render the cross of Christ the sign of victory for its legions in place of the Roman Eagle. The 'Galilean' entered the world as a conqueror. The same burning enthusiasm which sent forth the first apostle also set the missionaries aglow and brought all Europe and Africa, and finally the American continent under the sceptre of the omnipotent Christ."

There is the thrilling tribute of the poet Shelley, where, with burning words, he describes in "Hellas" the triumphs of Jesus, although Shelley — poor, blinded, wandering soul — was not a Christian in belief:

“A power from the unknown God,
A Promethean conqueror came;
Like a triumphal path he trod
The thorns of death and shame.
A mortal shape to Him
Was like the vapour dim;
Hell, Sin, and Slavery came,
Like bloodhounds mild and tame.
The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set;
While blazoned as on heaven’s immortal noon
The cross leads generations on.”

Take these testimonies made by men who were not professing Christians, and what do they exhibit? Simply this, that the character of Christ, and especially in its supreme manifestation on the Cross, has so impressed itself on the life of the world that you might as well try to explain the physical world by denying the law of gravitation as attempt to explain the faith and hope, the thought and progress, of these nineteen centuries by eliminating the Divine and Historic Christ. It is the claim of science that it takes cognizance of all the facts. Let science, then, in accounting for and explaining the forces, moral as well as physical, in modern life, take knowledge of this supreme and abiding fact in Christian history, — Jesus Christ and His words.

There are three ways in which Christ has impressed Himself on the life of man. First, He appeals to the imagination; He enthralls it

so that all that is deepest and most sacred in Christian art and poetry clusters around the Man of Calvary. Secondly, He appeals to the conscience, so that under His teaching, as Lecky shows, a new ideal of morals, new qualities of mercy and pity and love between man and man were created, and revolutionized the face of society. Thirdly, He appeals to the heart, so that Christ has so laid hold of the deepest affections and emotions of men that all life becomes transfigured when the love of Christ enters a human soul. Love is the immortal thing in life, and so long as Christ can hold the citadel of human love, so long as His spirit can transfuse that love with the light of God, His influence cannot die. Time cannot weaken it. Centuries pale before its virility. Heaven and earth may indeed pass away, but His words abide with the eternal years, for they are the words of eternal life.

What, then, is the message of Christ to an age of science? On the one hand, it is a word of good will. Christianity has no quarrel with science. The religion of Christ is the religion of progress, and it rejoices in each new discovery which science unveils. The religion of Christ is the religion of truth, and it has nothing to fear from the untraversed realms of human inquiry.

On the other hand, the message of Christ to an age of science is a word of caution. There are chambers of human experience which science

cannot enter. Between the soul and its Maker, not science, but Christ, must stand. In that solemn moment, when through what is seen the soul looks out into the unseen, not science, but He, must be our guide, until we stand face to face with God.

XVIII

THE UNREAL ELEMENT IN LIFE

*Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. . . .
Strengthen the things which remain. — REVELATION
iii. 2.*

THE magic of a name may be, and often is, a potent force in life. A powerful name may be like charity; it covers a multitude of sins. Many a degenerate son is forgiven by society his moral lapses, and even worse things, because he bears the honored name of an honored sire. Many a decadent business, trading in adulterated trash, retains a certain confidence in the public mind because it bears a name that a generation before was respected for integrity and honest dealing. Trading upon a good name is one of the best assets of a scoundrel. Yet few things are sadder than the slow deterioration of a good name. Once the synonym of upright dealing, it gradually sinks to the level of disreputable significance. To be indifferent to a good name is to be heedless of the things that count in life and character.

That is the thought of this morning's text. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" — so the wealthy, popular church of Sardis is

described. It enjoyed, in a city of wealth, a big reputation. It had a name that carried a premium of respect. No one ever questioned what the church of Sardis did. Even if it did not do anything, it still retained its name that it lived. A member of the church at Sardis was a man to be respected, even although sometimes people may not have known precisely why. He had a name, that was enough. Nevertheless, to the All-seeing eye of God Sardis and its people were living on appearances. Their reputation was a sham. Their respectability was a veneer. Their complacency was a mockery, and so the scathing word of Divine judgment is spoken, "Thou hast a name, but thou art dead." Dead — your life is a pretense, and your reputation is built, not on the eternal realities, but on the cheap and fleeting unrealities of life.

In all this there is a very practical application to some of our prevailing modes of living to-day. Not the Church alone, not the individual Christian alone, but what we call society, — men and women who scarcely ever enter the church, — are to-day living unreal lives. The unreal element enters so much into the things we do.

By the "unreal" I do not mean things that are deliberately false, but I mean that element in life which is simply for show, without regard to reality or sincerity. As Wordsworth, the poet of sincerity, expressed it so truly a century ago,

“I am opprest
 To think that now our life is only drest
 For show; mean handiwork of craftsman, cook,
 Or groom! We must run glittering, like a brook
 In the open sunshine, or we are unblest.”

Think for a moment how many people around you, if not yourself, order their lives simply and solely for the sake of display. If we have a name, — a name for wealth, a name for hospitality, a name for extravagance, a name for giving the best entertainment, a name for inventing some new form of dissipation, anything in fact that will put us before the public eye, — that is the ambition of so many of us to-day. “To have a name” for something, no matter what that something is or whether the name is worthy or not, is the standard of success in much of our modern ways; and instead of being real and earnest, life becomes as unreal as an empty dream.

The causes of this unreality are not far to seek. In the case of Sardis, for example, the causes were, I think, twofold.

On the one hand, in Sardis, one of the very richest of ancient cities, the seat of Cræsus the wealthiest of ancient potentates, Christianity seems to have been not only tolerated, but actually patronized. No persecution rent the church at Sardis. The people did not have to fight for their religion. It came to them so easily that they took it as a matter of course, and the result was that

religion became nominal, not real. Sardis was the birthplace of nominal Christianity.

Here in our city churches practically the same thing has happened. Religion, instead of being, as it ought, the supreme reality in life, is pretty much the most unreal thing about us. How can religion be a reality to any man if, assenting to certain beliefs on Sunday, he deliberately gives the lie to every essential doctrine of his faith in his business transactions on Monday? How can religion be a reality to any woman if, professing certain fundamental beliefs on Sunday, she also devotes her social life throughout the week to interests that are in direct antagonism to the spirit of Christ? The unreality of our religion! A vague, indefinite mass of semi-religious emotion is about all that religion amounts to in the thought of so many of us to-day. It would almost appear as if the churches, by elaborating the mere trimmings of religion, were conspiring to add to its unreality. So far as our church services tend to become performances or spectacles, however impressive to the æsthetic sense, they contribute to the unreal element in religion.

The reason of it all is, as it was in Sardis, that the world's spirit has compromised with the Church. No man needs to fight for his religion to-day, unless he wants to. We are so tolerant of evil that we have become indifferent to righteousness. We are simply professing a make-

believe religion. The nominal Christian is a man who is willing to trade in social or business life on the name "Christian" without accepting the moral and spiritual liabilities which the name "Christian" creates. If we are unreal in our religion, the certainty is that we shall be unreal in every other relation in life. Unreality in religion means an unreal relation to God, and if a man is not honest and sincere in his relations to God, he certainly will not be honest and sincere in his relations to his fellowmen. Our thought of God is the most influential thought we have, whether we admit it or not. It influences every other thought, so that, if unreality enters into our relation with God, that unreality will tinge all character and life.

What we need is what Sardis needed, an awakening to the necessity of fighting for the vitality of our religion. What is it that alone can give vitality to faith? No pressure of external authority will do it; no appeals to sacred documents, however venerable, will do it; no elaborated forms, appealing simply to the eye or sense, will do it. All these things belong to the unreal in religion. Religion becomes real only when it is rooted and grounded in personal experience. The vitalizing of belief is possible only through the vitality of the believer. Unless religion is enthroned in character as its supreme authority, it is simply an anæsthetic to conscience,

and that, strangely enough, is the explanation why so many people who are morally adrift are often so intensely religious. The pains of conscience are soothed by the opiate of religious emotion.

Persecution will never trouble a church that keeps its life sterilized of gospel truth. Sardis and New York are alike secure from the martyr's crown so long as they are careful to keep religion and life on terms of a mere bowing acquaintance. But let the awakening come that brings with it the merging of truth in conscience, the enthronement of conviction in character, the rooting of faith in life, and everywhere men will arise to whom religion is the supreme reality, and the thought of God the controlling impulse in conduct.

The second cause of unreality in the life of Sardis arose from the easy-going circumstances of the people. Sardis was a wealthy city. The struggle for life was not particularly felt there. People did not trouble themselves about the deeper things of life, they were so well content with its superficial pleasures and interests. It is noted, for instance, that there was no heresy in Sardis. The people did not care enough for Christianity to grow heretical about it. They were perfectly willing to receive on trust the traditions of their fathers in an easy-going way. What the fathers believed was good enough for them.

Here, once more, is another reason for the un-

reality in so much of our religious life to-day. We are content with a superficial view of things. We would rather be spared the trouble of digging down to the roots. If we are orthodox, it is largely because we are too lazy to be heterodox. Our religion does not amount to enough to be a subject of inquiry, and if at times we glow with righteous indignation over the heretic, it is more because he disturbs our indolent peace of mind than that we care particularly for the truth. Of course, heresy in the Church or out of it is to be deplored, but at least it is a symptom of life. It means that some one is thinking about his faith, and even if as a heretic he thinks wrongly, at least he stimulates other people to think rightly. It means that the dry bones in the valley of intellectual death are feeling the breath of the spirit. Heterodoxy on fire is better than orthodoxy on ice. Frost-bitten hands or feet are perfectly comfortable as long as they stay frost-bitten; it is the awakening again to life that causes the pain. So it is with a church that is perfectly self-complacent. Like the church at Sardis, its very orthodoxy may be the most unreal thing about it.

So much, then, for the causes of unreality. Let me point out one or two ways in which this unreal element asserts itself.

In the first place, the unreal element reveals itself when we put the emphasis on reputation instead of character. That, of course, is the

fundamental difference between the real and the unreal man. The unreal man is all for reputation. He poses before the glass of fashion and adjusts himself constantly to the changing shadows it reflects. A reputation is probably the most fleeting possession in life. It melts like snow in June. It was said of Byron that he awoke one morning to find himself famous, yet how many men in this city in these recent months have awakened to find themselves in-famous. A reputation is like a boomerang in some men's lives. Projected to strike the quarry of success, it returns hurtling to wound the head of the hunter.

Woe betide the man who lives only for his reputation, and whose supreme aim is to stand well in the favor of his fellow mortals! Such a man is the slave of other people's opinions. Lacking any central standpoint of his own, his constant effort is to get on to the standpoint of other people whose favor he seeks. The result is that conviction has no place in his soul. He himself becomes a bundle of pleasant insincerities and superficial infidelities. The unreal prize of reputation blinds him to the real trophy of character.

I do not know anything more utterly pitiful than the spectacle of a man trying to dress up his soul in the threadbare rags of a worn-out reputation. It is tragic, for instance, to see a professional man, be he a minister, lawyer, or doctor,

trying to eke out a little success by trading on his reputation for skill of nearly twenty years ago. It is tragic to listen to a public speaker who tries to win applause by reproducing the artificial flights of rhetoric which stirred enthusiasm in a previous generation but which have no message for to-day. It is tragic to listen to the quavering notes of an old singer whose popularity has outlived his voice, or to stand before the crazy picture of an artist whose reputation has outlasted his genius. But it is most tragic of all to meet the Christian who tells you of his devotion to Christ of ten or twenty years ago, when he enjoyed the reputation of being an active worker in the church, but who now sits before the ashes of an altar from which the sacred flame of Divine love and service has forever passed away. Living on one's reputation is a poor business, and yet in this unreality so many of us are content to live to-day.

Let us realize that it is not what we were ten or twenty years ago, but what we are at this moment, that gives life its reality and earnestness. President Woodrow Wilson said the other evening that the purpose of all education is reality. Well, the mission of Christ is a supreme call to reality in character, to vindicate the great truth that it is not what the world thinks we are, but what God knows us to be, that alone counts in the final adjustment of things. Put the emphasis on reputation, and you place a premium on

the unreal and therefore fictitious elements in life. After all, the supreme question for each one of us is not, What is to become of me? but, What am I becoming in the sight of the All-seeing eye of God? God save us from the doom of Sardis: "Thou hast a reputation, but thou art dead."

A second phase of the unreal element in life appears when we put the emphasis on merely outward comforts and luxuries instead of on inward peace and contentment. Life becomes unreal when it emphasizes the material rather than the spiritual. There is, of course, no harm in a man surrounding himself with luxury and comfort, if he can afford it, so long as those things do not stifle the deeper needs of his soul. The gospel has no quarrel with material comfort in itself. The ideal of the Christian home is not necessarily an anchorite's cell, stripped of all human refinement. But when our happiness is made to depend upon elaborated comforts in which luxury runs riot, and upon multiplied pleasures without regard to any higher interest, then it is that the deeper realities of life are inevitably destroyed.

You remember how in Southern France the fields for miles are fragrant with the mingled perfumes of many flowers of gorgeous beauty. The air is laden with these rich perfumes of nature, but when these blooms have been gathered

for the market and piled into great heaps, a strange thing happens. The odor becomes so overpowering that, as Dr. Watkinson tells us,¹ the harvesters suffer from one of the worst and most aggravated forms of hay-fever, so severe in some cases that hardly a season passes without some orange-blossom picker dying of syncope. It is a parable of the way in which simple pleasures and comforts, innocent and beautiful in themselves, yet when piled up into mountainous luxuries, create a disease which poisons the soul. There are joys and pleasures in modern life against which the gospel makes no protest; they contribute to the realness of living, but when you heap up these things day after day without any room for higher thoughts, when you strip the fields of nature to crowd your pleasures, what can you expect but that the soul will be stifled by the hideous unreality of it all?

It is under such artificial conditions, which prevail so largely to-day that life, for multitudes of people, becomes unreal. The emphasis is on the wrong things. "Plain living and high thinking" are forced to yield before the tyranny of material aims which are as unreal as a phantom. One thinks of the utter pathos of the last days in the life of the French poet, Verlaine, who died a few years ago. Brilliant as he was, his mind had become weakened through

¹ "Spirituality and Civilization."

the dissipation of the Boulevards, and he occupied his hours of monotony in painting the cheap deal chairs and tables of his dingy garret with gilt paint. To his demented fancy that pot of gilt paint made the poet's sordid chambers as splendid as the royal palace with its furnishings of gold. In the dream of that tragic unreality the poet lived and died. And yet what did well enough for an imbecile is pretty poor business for people presumably sane. The dream of the gold paint is everywhere to-day. The venter of unreality lies thick upon all our lives. If we cannot inherit kings' houses, we suppose we can at least paint the unreal until it counterfeits the real. We forget that in so ventering the framework of life the gilt paint slops over, and makes our own souls ghastly with its varnish of unreality.

What, then, is the cure for this unreality in life? If life is to be real and earnest for each one of us, filled with joys that do not pass away, bringing blessings not only to ourselves but to others, and leaving behind it an influence which is like a fragrant perfume or a tender melody, what must we do? The answer is found in our text. To this church at Sardis, that enjoyed its reputation but was dead, Christ says, "Strengthen the things which remain"; that is to say, "Strengthen the things which abide." Do not put the emphasis upon the transitory elements

which so swiftly pass away, but put the emphasis upon the abiding things in life. What are they? There are at least three things which, if you and I strengthen and cherish, will give life a glorious reality and an undying immortality. What are they? Faith in God, Conscience in duty, and Love to our fellowmen. Make these three elements living realities in your life, and you will be amazed to see how they will transfigure your whole outlook.

Strengthen your faith in God by daily prayer and fellowship with the living Christ, and that will bring spiritual revival. Strengthen your conscience by daily self-examination as to the rightness of every action you do, and that will bring the ethical revival. Strengthen your love to your fellowmen by daily acts of kindness and charity, and that will bring what perhaps we need the most, — the social revival, the healing of the sores of suspicion between class and class, and the deepening of our sense of brotherhood in Jesus Christ. Above all things else, in the strengthening of these three elements, Faith in God, Conscience in duty, and Love to our fellow mortals, the falseness and superficiality of our lives will pass before that sense of Divine reality into which Christ calls us.

XIX

THE BLUNDER OF THE BUILDERS

The stone which the builders refused has become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. — PSALM cxviii. 22, 23.

THESE words describe an incident connected with the building of the temple, which, apparently trivial at the time, was destined to become immortal in Jewish thought and history. When the builders were pressing forward the work of rearing the massive temple walls, it happened one day that the laborers dragged up a huge block of unusual size and shape. For some reason this giant boulder was deemed unsuitable and for weeks and perhaps months it lay aside neglected. Then a strange thing happened. At a certain angle of the wall, where a heavy gable of the temple was to rest, a niche was discovered which demanded a stone of unusual shape and of more than ordinary size and strength. That was the opportunity of the rejected stone. Attention was called to it. Why not try it and see whether, after all, its peculiar shape and size did not fit it exactly for the vacant niche? Behold, it was even so! The rejected stone filled up the space,

as though the hand of nature and not the hand of man had fashioned it. The stone which the builders refused became the head stone of the corner.

Such is the story, if story it can be called, which our text enshrines, — simple enough, and yet with just enough providence in it for the pious Jew to see the Divine hand in this rescuing of the neglected stone, and not only providing for it but finally crowning it with special honor.

So it came to pass that what was popularly known amongst the Jews as “the blunder of the builders” passed into the speech of the people as a proverb, until at last in the New Testament it was lifted into a solemn prophecy of Him who, though despised and rejected of men, was honored of God as the Redeemer of mankind. In three of the Gospels our text is so used in its application to Christ. It is so adopted by Peter in one of his discourses in the Book of Acts, and again by him in his First Epistle, whilst Paul makes frequent reference, more or less direct, to Him who is the “chief corner-stone” in the great temple of human life and character. “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, even Christ Jesus.”

Taking this incident, then, as a parable of life, the blunder of the builders corrected by the providence of God, let us notice, in the first place, how often in our own human experience this par-

able finds illustration, and then we shall be better able to appreciate its application to the history of our Lord and Saviour.

First of all, interpreting our text in its purely human aspect, have we not here in this incident of the rejected stone a picture of misunderstood lives, a parable of unappreciated life? When I say misunderstood lives, I mean men and women who are misunderstood by their own age and associates. Have you ever thought how much of the silent tragedy of life, how much of hidden sorrow, springs from this cause, life misunderstood and unappreciated? How frequently, for example, you hear one say, as he speaks of a friend who has died, "I never really understood him, his goodness and worth, till I lost him." One of the most pathetic instances in the first years of my ministry was to witness the anguish of a husband who, bending over the bier of his dead wife, exclaimed, in a voice stifled with emotion, "I never appreciated your love enough." What did that cry mean but that, in building the temple of his home, this man had repeated the blunder of the builders and had practically neglected the love which God had given to be the chief corner-stone in his family joy? How many home temples to-day are lying in the ruins of discord for that very reason! The love and devotion of husband or wife, that should have been the chief corner-stone, has not only been neglected but broken by the

impious hands of unfaithfulness or indifference. Lives misunderstood, love unappreciated, devotion neglected, the tender ministry of a woman's love cast aside, — ah! there is the hidden spring of much of life's silent tragedy.

And yet is there no recompense? Is there no Divine compensation? Shall not God avenge His own elect? Lo, the stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner.

There are other ways in which our text is a parable of unappreciated life. Take, for example, the not uncommon experience of a child in the home, ungainly in appearance, unattractive in manners, slow of apprehension, or, as we say in Scotland, "not gleg in the up-tak"; and so, unappreciated, misunderstood by parents and friends, the boy goes out to the world carrying with him the memory of a neglected childhood. Then so often the miracle takes place. As new forces play upon him, as new surroundings touch him, and new demands call out his slumbering powers, the man's energies are roused. The latent possibilities of his nature realize themselves, and he finds his place in the world. The stone which the builders rejected is made the head of the corner. The unattractive boy becomes the family pride, and relatives once prophets of ill omen, who could see no good in him, now become his enthusiastic admirers, complacently telling you that they always predicted something

wonderful for him. Yet how often these words of belated praise hardly atone for and scarcely take away the sting from the shadowed years of youth, when in silence and contempt the lad lay aside as a useless block in the quarry of life's activities.

May I speak a word to parents here? Don't fret, as parents sometimes do, if your children are not precocious, precocious in genius or in intellect or in speech, so that you cannot retail their precocious utterances for the delectation (or disgust) of your relatives. Precocious childhood often degenerates into stunted manhood. Do not try to force your children if they are not up to the mark of your ambition. Forced childhood, like forced fruit, is likely to be insipid, and it easily spoils. Be patient, and, above all things, be prayerful. God and nature will do more than your forcing. Be tender, and do not let veiled sarcasm and hasty words blunt the keen edge of feeling. Some day that boy or girl of yours may be the chief corner-stone in some angle of the great temple of human achievement. See to it that you have your share in fashioning the stone for its final place.

The truth is, nothing is more suggestive in biography than that some of the greatest men have been dull and backward in childhood. The most mellowed character, like late fruit, ripens slowest. On the other hand, the brilliant student,

the pet and idol of school or college, not seldom, though by no means always, fails in later life, through an overweening self-conceit or incapacity for the practical problems of life. Such brilliant prodigies of youth often fail in the ordinary commonplace tasks. To change the figure for a moment, they are like flowers which bloom too early and the late frosts of life's young summer nip their powers. Frost-bitten, they hang withered in the garden of effort and success.

I know no more striking example of this truth of our text than the life of Abraham Lincoln supplies. Look at him in the early days of his struggle, and certainly there was little to attract. Rough in speech, lank and ungainly in appearance, it would have been little wonder if he had been neglected and rejected as utterly unsuited for the responsibilities of great office. Yet true to his life ideal, true to principle, that rough, unchiseled block of young American character was polished and fashioned beneath the grinding stone of long discipline, until at last the chief stone of the corner was ready for its place in the temple of national life. When the walls of the temple of American liberty were rent by rebellion and were tottering beneath the shock of civil war, it was this man who filled the vacant niche, and on whom rested the hopes, the policy, and the future of a reunited people. To-day Lincoln stands in American history as one of the

chief stones of the corner, honored of God and revered by men.

Our text is not only a parable of misunderstood lives, it is also a picture of unappreciated truth. How often the truth which to-day lies at the foundation of life was in a previous age sneered at and condemned! The great builders of the temple of truth have frequently been forced to confess their blunder in casting aside some new idea quarried out of eternity but whose significance they failed to understand. You may say that there are four stages in the history of an idea: first, contempt; second, opposition; third, examination; and fourth, vindication. Apply these four stages to the parable of our text, and the first is the rejection of the stone, the second is its polishing and chiseling, the third is measuring it for its niche, and the fourth is placing it in its permanent position. How true that was of the Christian idea! As Renan has so suggestively remarked, "All great ideas ferment in the corruption of great cities." So it was in the history of Christian truth. There was first the stage of contempt, when, amidst the corruption of Antioch and Corinth and Ephesus and Rome, the gospel was condemned and despised, yet all the while working as the leaven that was to change the character of the world. Then came the stage of opposition, when through the great persecutions of the Roman Empire Christianity was re-

fined and polished beneath the graving-knives of opposition. Then came its critical examination by philosopher and skeptic and theologian, when the truths were set forth in true perspective. Finally, to-day we are witnessing the gradual enthronement of Christianity as the chief cornerstone in the world's civilization.

The blunder of the builders reminds us of the compensations which God reserves for His servants who are misunderstood or unappreciated. Nothing so profoundly evidences the Divine presence in history as the reversal of human judgments, one generation rescinding the decisions of the previous generation. One age stones its prophets, and another age builds their sepulchres. True, whited sepulchres seem cold enough comfort for blackened reputations. A rejected life may find little consolation in glorified memory. But who can doubt that this reversal of human judgment is but the earthly side of the Divine compensation whose real significance is seen in heaven? Our text lifts for a moment the curtain that sways between time and eternity, long enough to see how lives that are stunted here break into the fullness of unshackled power yonder. Rejected by the builders of earth, they become chief corner-stones in that city whose builder and maker is God. Emerson, in his essay on "Compensation," says, somewhat cynically, that "heaven was made of the dreams of the

poor." But heaven has surely a deeper significance than simply to fulfill the dreams of poverty. Heaven is bigger than an epigram, and eternity cannot be disposed of by an aphorism. Heaven is built of stronger stuff than that which dreams are made of. Man's ideals are God's realities. And the unquenched ideals which no scorn nor contempt can destroy here, will be satisfied yonder, in the completed working plan of God's great universe. Be true to your ideals, hold on to your principles, no matter in what despite your life be lived, and your vindication will come at last.

But this reversal of the builders' blunder is not necessarily deferred to eternity. We witness the vindication of rejected truth on this earth. The poet whom the critics scorned, the artist whose pictures the public laughed at, the musician whose music sounded harsh and uncouth in his own age, the statesman whose policy was denounced as quixotic in his own day, — all these, if the vein of truth is in them, come to their own at last, and the common people, the world's true builders, give them their destined place. You may try, for instance, to build a city on the foundations of corruption and vice; you may dig deep to entrench these foundations of evil, so that no shock of reform can move them; you may contemptuously toss aside as the vagaries of cranks and fools the ideals of civic right-

eousness and integrity. For a time that folly of the builders will prevail. The temple of the city's life will seem to rise on the tottering stones of corrupt politics. But the day of vindication comes at last. To that day, in the good providence of God, we have come in this city. We have reversed the blunder of the builders, and we are going to blast out the rottenness and vice on which the structure of our civic life has rested too long. By the good grace of God we will put down in their place the rejected stones of good character, high ideals, and incorruptible principles, on which alone civic stability can be secured, — disallowed indeed of the builders, but at last vindicated by God.

To achieve all this, we turn to the last application of our text, as a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is the glory of our age that never was the place of Christ in human history so clearly recognized as now. The enlightened intelligence of our day willingly pays its homage to the creative influence of Christ and His gospel. Men recognize to-day that to take Christ out of these centuries of progress would be to tear down the whole structure of modern civilization. History is unthinkable, progress becomes a chaos, apart from the underlying influence of Jesus Christ. All that is deepest and most sacred in life to-day, the noblest charities, the most enduring influences, the hopes of prog-

ress, no less than the achievements of the past, rest upon the great truths which became incarnate in His character and found expression in His life.

With this great Corner-stone in the temple of human life, what are we doing? Are we trying to perpetuate the blunder of the builders in our own individual experience? Are we trying to build character for eternity apart from Jesus Christ? You may attempt it if you will, but remember what Christ's words were. It was of Himself that He spoke when He said, "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder." These words reveal the two final stages in the blunder of the builders who reject Christ and deny His place in the temple of the soul. In the first stage you maim life by leaving Christ out of it. He becomes a stone of stumbling instead of a stone of strength in your life. But in the second stage the parable passes into dread reality. The Stone you reject, the Christ you refuse, no longer lies inert. Like some mighty boulder on a far-off mountain height, loosened by wintry rains, it begins to move, until, inch by inch, with ever increasing speed, it falls at last with resistless power, and grinds to powder those who oppose its way. So Christ spoke of those who refuse His message. It is the final tragedy in the blunder of the builders.

XX

THE MAN WHO DID NO MIRACLE

John did no miracle; but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there. — JOHN X. 41, 42.

THE Saviour's life was drawing to its close. Already the sadness of its later days was thickening around him, and over His pathway the lengthening shadows of the cross were deepening. Persecution and desertion had begun to show themselves, and it was at this moment that the news of the Baptist's tragic death was brought to Christ. Who can doubt that it must have appeared to Him prophetic of his own end so soon to be accomplished? Who wonders if in such an hour of desolation He should yearn for some secluded place where in quiet thought and communion He might set His face steadfastly towards His own journey's close? And yet was there not something intensely human in the place which the Saviour chose for this brief period of retirement? Where did he go? Back to that very desert where John himself at the first had baptized and where in the early days of his own ministry John and He had met for the first time.

“There He abode,” says the evangelist; there amidst the kindling memories of that place which had rung with the words of the Baptist’s heaven-born eloquence as he preached the coming Christ, and there too where Jesus himself had crossed the threshold of His own life-work, once more the Saviour turned His face in this hour of grief, when John lay dead in his dungeon and the premonition of His own death was so real and so near.

Then what happened? Quickly the Saviour’s seclusion was broken. The multitudes, already stirred by the news of the Baptist’s death, and hearing that Jesus had gone back to the very place where John had testified of Him, were impelled to follow Christ, and so once more the wilderness around Jordan was thronged with a crowd of listeners, — some to compare Jesus with John, as people still will compare the new preacher with the old, some to hear what Jesus would say of John, as people still throng to hear the eulogy of one public man upon another who is dead, and some doubtless to confirm what John had foretold concerning Jesus. So, inspired by such varied motives, the multitude came together, and here in our text is the testimony; here is the verdict of the common people concerning the preacher who is dead and the preacher who was before, “John did no miracle.”

So John’s ministry was vindicated at the last.

So, although he himself was dead, his words yet spoke; and there, where he had baptized at the first, his testimony to Christ was sealed in the conversion of many who remembered his words of days gone by.

Such is the story, and the subject which it naturally suggests is "The Power of Testimony for Christ." I propose to analyze the theme from two general standpoints: I. What Christian testimony to be effective does not need; II. What Christian testimony to be effective does need. In closing, I shall speak a word or two about testimony for Christ as the secret of our abiding influence amongst men.

I. We are to learn from these words what testimony for Christ to be effective does not need. On this negative side our text suggests three things which are not necessary for effective witness-bearing, and yet three things which people are constantly supposing are necessary, and which, because they do not possess, they suppose are a sufficient reason for their speaking not a word on behalf of Christ.

Our text reminds us that Christian testimony to be effective needs no miracle of eloquence or power on the part of the witness-bearer. John did no miracle. Doubtless these words expressed a certain disappointment about John. He had been hailed by the common people as Elijah returned to earth again. His appearance, his rude

ascetic dress, his scathing eloquence, all recalled the form and ministry of the most dramatic of Israel's prophets, but, unlike Elijah, John did no miracle. He could not dry up the heavens, he could not raise the dead, he was not fed by the ravens. There was nothing supernatural or miraculous about him. He was simply a preacher who had testified of the coming Messiah. But that testimony was sufficient, every part of it was true. It had the ring of sincerity and the passion of conviction, and many believed on Jesus there.

Is there not a tendency to forget this in our modern religious life? Do I exaggerate when I say that it is the miracle, the spectacular in religion rather than the testimony which people run after to-day? The preacher who can work miracles of eloquence, who can dazzle by intellectual brilliance, or the church that is a miracle of æsthetic beauty, or the choir that can perform miracles in the way of artistic music, — in a word, anything that is spectacular, dramatic, thrilling, is what the world runs after to-day. Whether all these things testify to Christ, whether the great orator lifts up himself rather than the crucified Redeemer, whether the music is more suggestive of the opera than of heaven, people do not trouble to think. The testimony is secondary; it is the miracle, the spectacular, that is everything. Religion under such influences be-

comes a parade of striking effects rather than the simple testimony of the heart. The average man regards testimony for Christ as a kind of elocutionary exhibition, and as he has neither time nor capacity for such things his testimony for the Master is silent. It is time that we got rid of this stiff formality in our religion. A word for Christ, spoken not in any canting sanctimonious way, not forced or dragged into our conversation as a kind of holy condiment, but a simple word for Christ, a word of acknowledgment for His goodness, a word of defense when His name is profaned, a word of confession when our religion is challenged, — that needs no miracle; but if it is true, its very simplicity, its spontaneousness, and above all else its sincerity, make it a word that will not pass away. We are no miracle-workers, we are simple commonplace people, but there is not one of us that cannot in daily life say a word of testimony for our Master that shall be effective throughout eternity. "John did no miracle."

But Christian testimony to be effective needs no large space for its utterances. John was what you might call a local preacher, his ministry was confined to one place. He was only a voice crying in the wilderness, he never spoke in the cities or the great centers of population. In the desert to those who came to him he made his testimony for Christ, and that testimony was not lost.

Here again is a mistake that we often make. The common idea seems to be that the effectiveness of Christian testimony depends on the largeness of the place where it is given. A revival we suppose is not possible without packing the largest halls, its meetings must be conducted by men of national or international reputation, and its testimony meetings must be thronged. I do not for a moment question that at certain seasons such methods have their undoubted place, but if Christian testimony is to be identified only with public places, big crowds, and emotional surroundings, then the religion of Jesus Christ is not for common life. How often the testimonies given under such circumstances are transitory and vain, nay, are oftentimes trampled under the feet of those who make them. The best testimony for Christ, after all, is that which day by day is made within the limits of the home, which parents, father and mother, live before their children, which an invalid reveals in patient submission on a sick-bed, which a Sunday-school teacher unfolds to a class of two or three children. In such local places, shut out from the hum of the world's busy life, testimony for Christ is effective beyond what any of us can realize. In the wilderness of retirement or of sorrow or of sickness you and I may speak, through the silent influence of character, a word for Christ that shall be a word of life.

Once more, our text reminds us that Christian

testimony to be effective does not need to be accepted at once. Notice that several years had passed since John had testified of Christ in the wilderness; it was not till John was dead that his testimony was accepted. John never knew, on this earth at least, of the blessing of his words. These many conversions were the posthumous results of his ministry, they were the fruitage after death of his sowing of the seed. How many of us grow discouraged because we do not see immediate results! How many people are sitting silent, never speaking a word for Christ at home, in the world, or in the church, because years ago some one laughed at their efforts or did not appreciate sufficiently their service! Unless we get immediate results in our work for Christ, all too quickly our zeal falls to zero and our love turns into petrified indifference. I sometimes think that this working for results is one of the curses of our Christian work. Statistics are the Golgotha of many a pure ideal. Many who are willing to work for Christ in the glory of unconscious self-sacrifice are suddenly pulled up by the thought of an annual report. No, friends, your prayers and labors may seem to you to-day to be poor and worthless, but remember that with the harvest you have nothing to do. What says Christ? "The reapers are the angels." After all, man is only a sower. It is the angels who reap. It is for you and me to provide the

harvest. We sow the seed, but they gather in the ripened grain. Do not, then, measure the effectiveness of your testimony for Christ by what you see; though the seed fall on barren ground, yet says the Lord, "The desert shall rejoice and blossom abundantly, yea, it shall blossom as the rose." As for John, so for you; the years shall travel on, and you may have passed outward into the dim shadowy world of eternity, and yet somewhere here on earth a word of yours shall tell in the conversion of an immortal soul.

II. This leads me to the positive side of our subject, namely, What Christian testimony to be effective does need.

In the first place, it must be complete, whole-hearted, sincere. All things, says our text, that John spake concerning Christ were true. Multitudes were not impressed by some points of resemblance in the witness-bearing of John to Christ. There were some things concerning which there was doubt or confusion. It was the irresistible influence of the *all things*, the absolute completeness with which his testimony was confirmed by the living Christ, that inspired their faith and compelled their surrender. May we not see here one reason why so much of our Christian testimony, such as it is, lacks convicting power? Some things we say of Christ are true, but how often there are other things, things not

only spoken by the lips but revealed in the life, that are directly in the teeth of our religious profession. So often our testimony for Christ is like the chameleon; it changes color, it adapts itself to the varying atmosphere of social life. To-day in the church there are many things perhaps about us that speak to the world of the love of Christ, but to-morrow in our business there are other things which give the lie direct to the testimony we have borne to-day. Can you wonder, friends, that this incompleteness, nay, antagonism, in so much of present-day witness-bearing bewilders the world and staggers it in its faith in Christ? What, for example, is the worker to think of us if to-day singing "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love," to-morrow in business or in trade we reveal a spirit of cold-hearted selfishness and tyranny over the poor and helpless that grinds them to the very earth? No, it is not the quantity of witness-bearing that tells, but it is the quality. You and I may not say many things of Christ, but, be our words many or few, let them be consistent, coherent, and complete, and through us many shall believe on the Saviour here.

Again, Christian testimony to be effective must center itself around Christ. John's testimony, our text tells us, concerned itself with Christ alone, and it is this supremacy of Christ as the touchstone of our conduct and the central influence

in our lives that is demanded of us. We are so apt to grow earnest in our testimony about other things than Christ. For example, you will find some people who never speak a word for the Master, yet are wonderfully enthusiastic about the church. I do not for a moment blame such enthusiasm, but there is a danger in pressing the claims of the church — its social fellowship, its comfortable pews, its inspiring singing, or its eloquent preaching — lest in such testimony we make religion a purely human interest, and the church simply a religious club. Love your church by all means, work for it, and support it, but do so only as a means of exalting Christ without Whom the Church itself is nothing.

Then, again, there are others who are loyal in the defense of a creed, and here once more I would not for a moment cast doubt upon the earnestness of those who desire to preserve the integrity of our most holy faith. Yet how often enthusiasm for a creed engenders the bitterness of strife and the bigotry of narrowness! Orthodox zeal oftentimes passes into heterodox hate, and men who are eager in their defense of dogmas about Christ lose sight of that love and charity which should bind them to Christ and to one another. Let our lives, then, tell, and let every thought and word and act tell for the reality of Christ Himself as a living presence in our hearts, the Redeemer of our soul and the hope of our future.

This leads me in a closing sentence to speak of testimony for Christ as the secret of our abiding influence. John was dead, but for what was John remembered in that very place which years before had been the scene of his mighty eloquence? All that men remembered him for was the sincerity of his testimony to Christ, and it is the character of our witness-bearing for the Master that will determine our influence in the world after we have passed away. Other things that we have done, money that we have earned, fame that we have achieved, reputation that we have attained, — all these will be forgotten; but the testimony that we have borne for Christ, the word of love that we have spoken in His name with faltering lips, will endure, and like a casket will enshrine our immortality. In the center of the city of Glasgow, in one of the old churchyards now closed, there is one humble grave containing the body of a factory girl, humbly educated, for many years weak in health and who lived alone in a single room. In one of the mission churches she taught a class of rough, unruly boys; faithfully, tenderly, year after year she told them the simple story of the Cross, and one by one through her influence these lads were led to give their hearts to Christ. That was all her work. She rests to-day amidst the throb and roar of the city which scarcely knew her, and on her tombstone these simple words tell the story of her life: “ She did

no miracle, but all things she said of Jesus were true, and many believed on Him there." What better epitaph could you and I desire, what better welcome could we ask when we stand at last before our Saviour's face?

XXI

THREE MARKS OF A TRUE MAN

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? — MICAH vi. 6-8.

THE late Professor T. H. Huxley was hardly a believer in an orthodox sense, although, as a strenuous advocate of intellectual honesty, he did, as I think, a great service to the interests of religion as well as science. Yet it is from the pen of this man of science, writing in the zenith of his power and influence, that has come one of the most impressive tributes of admiration to this text: "In the Eighth Century before Christ, in the heart of a world of Polytheism and Idolatry, a Hebrew Prophet put forth in these words a conception of religion which is as wonderful an inspiration of genius as the art of Phidias or the science of Aristotle — "What doth

the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before thy God?"

Who will dispute that tribute of unqualified appreciation from one who was far from orthodox faith, but who felt the Divine power which throbs through these great words, setting forth, as they do, "an ideal of religion to which no subsequent age has been able to add either grandeur or tenderness"? Professor George Adam Smith describes our text as the very greatest saying in the Old Testament, adding that there is only one other saying in the New Testament which excels it, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And it is true, for in this utterance of the prophet Micah we hear the permanent and universal note in all true religion, — that note which, like the strains of such a song as "Home, sweet Home," touches all hearts, in all lands and in all ages, and knits them together in the grip of a common brotherhood. Beneath a verse like this all the bitterness of theological controversy is silenced, all the wrangling of the sects and rivalry of the churches pass into nothingness before this word of Divine and gracious authority, — "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Add the Cross to these words — and, as we shall see, it looms up behind them in majestic splendor — and in the radiance of that message of redeeming

love this text of Micah is a creed sufficient for every man, be he Jew or Gentile, Hindoo or Christian, who honestly and sincerely desires to live a true life before God and his fellowmen.

I do not exaggerate when I say that there never was a time when we needed so keenly the special aspect of religion emphasized in our text as now; nor, I will add, were men and women ever so ready as now to listen to preaching from such a text as this. The great demand, as we hear on every side to-day, is for what is called a practical religion. Men are constantly telling you that they have no place for a religion which is set forth like a problem in logic or has to be worked out like a proposition in mathematics. Of course, that demand for what is called a "practical religion" may be a very bald, superficial thing. For some the phrase "practical religion" may be equivalent to no religion at all. It may mean for such people intellectual laziness and spiritual indifference, or, if it means more than that, it simply implies that they are to be left alone to do the best they can. But a text like this demands from the man who wants his religion to be practical the supremest effort of his life. Let any one face this aspect of life and character as Micah has interpreted it, and realizing his own utter weakness, he will feel the need of casting himself with deeper earnestness upon the grace of Jesus Christ. A text like this, so far from dis-

pensing with the need of a Saviour, only intensifies that need.

On the other hand, let me make it very clear that this demand for practical religion, expressed in terms such as our text gives, is really one of the healthiest symptoms in the spiritual life of to-day. For surely we have gained something when men are coming to regard their religion not only as a Sunday liability, but as a week-day asset — not as an obligation to be discharged by a perfunctory attendance at church, but as an inspiration to be realized in the service of God in common life.

Let us see, then, how far we may make practical in our own experience this ideal of religion as Micah lifted it up in his ministry at Jerusalem nearly three thousand years ago and to realize for ourselves these three marks of a true man, — “Doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.”

At this point it may be worth while to remember that the circumstances of the Hebrew people in Micah's age were, on a smaller scale of course, wonderfully similar to our own to-day; that is to say, about 750 B. C. the Jews, through immigration and other causes, had changed from an agricultural to a commercial nation. Their cities, especially Jerusalem, had grown enormously. Wealth and luxury had become common. Palaces, once the monopoly of kings, were now the

residences of merchant princes. With this increase of wealth on the one hand, poverty and its attendant miseries had become more aggravated on the other hand. Prophets, such as Micah and Hosea and Malachi, have much to say about the tyranny of wealth and the oppression of the poor. Bribery is constantly mentioned by them as one of the glaring sins of the time. Judges, they tell us, accepted gifts to render false judgment, and merchants used false scales in their merchandise. In short, the unscrupulous spirit of mammon was everywhere supreme. Yet, with all this, religion of a kind still prevailed. The temple, for instance, was thronged, sacrifices of great splendor were offered, the sacred feasts were scrupulously observed; but on the other hand, while there was plenty of religion, there was an appalling dearth of morality. Spiritual life was choked beneath the rubbish of material things, and religion had become a sort of white-wash that was rubbed over the rottenness of society. It was against this degenerate condition that Micah rose as a preacher of righteousness in Jerusalem.

So, in the first instance, our text is a rebuke, stern and scathing, of the conditions then prevailing, — that is to say, a rebuke of four false forms of religion: I. A rebuke of the religion of ceremony and ritual; II. A rebuke of the religion of ostentation; III. A rebuke of the reli-

gion of fanaticism; IV. A rebuke of the religion of narrow exclusiveness.

Let me speak very briefly of these as they existed in Micah's day, and I think we shall find that spiritually New York of the twentieth century has not travelled far from the Jerusalem of the eighth century before Christ.

I. Our text is a rebuke of the religion of mere outward ceremony and ritual. Micah, you notice, pictures the people as defending themselves by asking the question, "Well, how are we to worship God, wherewith shall we come before the Lord and bow ourselves before the high God? Shall we come before Him with burnt-offerings and calves of a year old?" In other words, the people defended themselves by saying they were observing the law of Moses, supporting the temple, subscribing to its worship, and observing its ceremonial ritual. What is Micah's answer? Echoing the words of his contemporary, Isaiah, he says, "No, God has no delight in these things in themselves." "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of he-goats. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to me. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth." What, then, does God demand? "He hath shewed thee, O man, what

is good; and what doth the Lord require but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly?"

Is there any message in all this for our religious life to-day? We hear a great deal in these days, especially from the ministers who are naturally interested, about the lack of church-going and the lack of Sabbath observance. Of course it is sad. The condition of multitudes in this city, who were brought up differently, but who ruthlessly absent themselves from the worship of God, is one of the darkest features in our spiritual condition, and yet let us be honest. Is it not a fact that a great deal of our churchgoing in the past was simply a piece of religious ceremonial? It was a kind of religious fashion. Men were in certain places socially ostracized if they did not attend church. Young people were driven there, and hence the idea grew up that going to church was in itself religion. Having done that, a man felt he had relieved his conscience of religious duties. Now that kind of churchgoing is very much a thing of the past. Very few people indeed to-day go to church because they have to; and I believe honestly that it is a far more healthy condition, that religion is being regarded less as a ceremony and more as a life. If churchgoing is not touching the needs of our common life, if it is not helping us to be just and merciful in our dealings with our fellowmen, if it is not teaching us how to

be sincere and humble before God, then — and again let us be honest — we might just as well never enter a church. I am no pessimist; I believe that a return will come, and more speedily than some of us think. Men and women will flock again to the house of God because these deep spiritual needs of the heart will cry out for satisfaction. But I also believe that this return to worship and Sabbath observance will be to worship God, not to hear pulpit oratory, so called, or to listen to choice music or bow before elaborated forms, but to learn the simple lesson of true religion, “How to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.”

II. Our text is a rebuke of the religion of ostentation. Micah, you will notice, pictures another man who defends himself and says in effect, “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams and with ten thousands of rivers of oil?” This was the response of the wealth in Jerusalem. This man, with his thousands of rams and his ten thousands of rivers of oil, had the idea that he could lubricate his way to heaven. He would make an impression by the largeness of his gifts. The ostentation of his piety would touch men’s hearts and, as he supposed, touch also the heart of God. Once more Micah’s answer is this: “God is not interested in your thousands of rams, or your

ten thousands of rivers of oil. What the Lord requires is that you do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before His face." It is the lowly and the contrite heart that God blesses; ostentation means nothing to Him. You cannot buy off your iniquities or cover up your cruelty by any such vain oblation. What God wants is the moral tribute of the heart.

Is there not this same element of ostentation in the religion of to-day? Are there not gifts made to religion whose main purpose is, How will it impress the public? Can I not buy God's favor with my gifts? Also, there is an ostentation in the religion of our churches. The lavish expenditure is too often not an effort to do honor to God, but an effort to advertise the particular church which can afford it. And still, as of old, God says, "The religion that wins my favor is the religion of justice, mercy, and humility." That, no doubt, will take the paint off a great deal of our so-called religion. It will deplete our decorations and perhaps put some of our churches into ruins, but, on the other hand, it will build up the temple of a contrite heart, in which God is well pleased to dwell.

III. Our text is a rebuke of the religion of fanaticism. There were fanatics in Jerusalem in Micah's day, and one of these men also appears before the prophet defending himself. "Where-with shall I come before the Lord," he asks;

“shall I not give my first-born for my transgressions, and the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” Here was a man who went a step further in his zeal. He was willing to sacrifice the child of his home, to offer up the first-born in bloody sacrifice to appease the wrath of God; and again the prophet rebukes the wild superstition and fanaticism of such a view by replying, “All that God asks of you is to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly.”

The religion of fanaticism, it may be, is not very common to-day, and yet there are fanatics in our churches and out of them. The fanatic of religion is the man or woman who is carried away with a fad, who runs to extremes in some *ism*, who, yielding to some emotion, devotes his or her life to the propagation of some little idea in religion which, according to their view, is going to transfigure the world. In that view of fanaticism there never was a time when we had quite so many fanatics as to-day, as here in America, the home of the religion of ungoverned emotion, the people of extremes, the supporters of this fad and that fad, the people who run after every new phase of religious excitement with the idea that God is going to do something wonderful because the view is new! What is the answer to these people but this word of Micah: “God is not interested in your novelties, God makes no fanatical demand upon your lives; all that he asks is to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly.

IV. Our text is the rebuke of exclusiveness. Inevitably all these other false types, ceremony, ostentation, fanaticism, are narrow and exclusive. The tendency is to build fences of privilege. The dominant note of false religion is railed spaces. But these ideas form the antithesis of a world-wide religion. The declaration of faith is contained in the words of Peter: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him." That utterance, I think, is the most revolutionary in the whole New Testament. Yet what does this mean? It means simply that true religion emphasizes the affirmations of a man's faith, and not his denials or his negations. His negations may be bad, but his affirmations may be divine. Let us accept both. Does he do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly? Then receive him into fellowship, not emphasizing the denial and dwelling on points of difference. That is the great cause of bigotry and strife.

What, then, does our text mean when it says, God requires these qualities?

We must realize this, that these three things are qualities in God's dealings with us. *He deals justly*. It was painful when the justice of God used to be preached as a threat, a thing which must of necessity be dreaded. But why should I fear the justice of God, my Father? He will

do right. "Just and true art Thou, O King of Saints." Justice is not cruel; it is not vindictive; it is not hate. *Love mercy.* If you read the last chapter of Micah, you will get a beautiful glimpse of the Divine character: "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy." *Walk humbly.* Is God humble? Look at the Cross and find your answer there. "He humbled Himself" to the death of the cross. He condescended to the estate of men of low degree.

Do you do justly, do you love mercy, do you walk humbly before God? These are the things which God requires of you.

XXII

THE IMPORTUNATE NEIGHBOR

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves: for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within, shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. — LUKE xi. 5-8.

THERE is a growing and deepening feeling amongst many Christian people that the spirit of prayer is a decadent grace in our modern Christian life. "We pray too little" is a confession often heard, even on the lips of the most earnest and consistent of Christians; and how much more true that confession must be, coming from those of us who are at best half-hearted in our spiritual service! No doubt, plenty of excuse for this lack of the spirit of prayer can be found. In the tremendous rush and strain of modern life most of us have but little time, as we believe, to spend in prayer with God.

“The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”

So it follows as an inevitable result that the lack of prayer leads to ignorance of prayer. If we cease to use a muscle, we not only weaken it through lack of use, but in time we forget how to use it; forgetfulness ends in ignorance. Some of you parents have a chubby-faced little boy who has just learned to walk. With eager, unsteady steps he can just balance himself across the room in safety. That little fellow falls ill, and for five or six weeks, wan and wasted, he lies in his cradle, until once more in the mercy of God he is convalescent; and, lo, he is as helpless as an infant, on his feet. He has to begin all over to learn the art of walking. So with prayer. In the early days of our spiritual experience we learn something of how to pray. We rejoice in its power, until in some period of trial or back-sliding we grow indifferent, and the prayer spirit weakens in our souls, until finally we have lost not only the joy but the very knowledge of how to pray. So on every hand to-day the cry is heard, “We pray too little.” And the Church is beginning to realize the solemn fact that not only its own revival but the carrying of Christ’s kingdom on earth depends less on the preaching of the word and more on the spirit of prayer.

Now, in dealing with the two parables of the

importunate widow and the poor publican, we see how practically and tenderly our Saviour deals with this problem of prayer. Like ourselves to-day, his disciples had realized their poverty in prayer. So their frequent petition to Jesus was not, "Master, teach us how to preach," but "Lord, teach us how to pray." And while we have but a single parable spoken on the art of preaching, we have many precepts and parables spoken on the culture of the spirit of prayer. The whole Bible is, in short, a manual on the science of prayer. For example, how many of us realize that on the question of special prayer (that is, prayer for some special definite object) there are recorded in Scripture thirty-four such special prayers, all of which received an answer, — not indeed always immediately, nor always in the exact way expected, but always in such a way as to awaken the suppliant's thankfulness to God for the answer given. From such a body of prayer what marvelous encouragement there is for all of us to go to our Heavenly Father with special petitions!

Once more, take the nature of prayer as it is defined in Scripture. How many of us know that in the Old and New Testaments this one word "prayer" is represented in the Hebrew and Greek by no fewer than twenty different words, all translated "prayer," but all defining some different shade or meaning of the spirit of prayer. Or

take up the study of one of the books of Scripture, and again you will notice the tremendous emphasis which is placed on the power of prayer. Take, for example, the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. That book is from beginning to end a history not so much of what the Apostles did as of what the Apostles got through prayer. In the first chapter we read that they all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication; and in the second chapter we read the result: When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place, and suddenly they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. Or turn to the fourth chapter. When the disciples went forth to preach Christ, we read that they all prayed for boldness to speak the word. And then it is added, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Or take the story of Cornelius, the first Gentile whose conversion to Christianity is recorded, and what do we read? "He was a devout man, and prayed to God always." With what result? The angel said unto him, "Thy prayers are come up before God." Once more, in the twelfth chapter you have the story of Peter's imprisonment and imminent death, locked up in a Roman dungeon, heavily chained. What did the Church do? "Prayer was made without ceasing unto God for him." And through the

Roman dungeon, and out of the hands of Herod's persecutors, Peter was delivered.

It is in the light of such historic testimony that we have come to feel to-day that the Church's reservoirs of power will never be fully utilized until she regains the tremendous power that lies behind prayer. It is for this reason I am asking your consideration of the subject of prayer. The two stories of the importunate widow and the poor publican illustrate this power of prayer in a different way. These two parables, standing side by side, illustrate the human and the divine sides of prayer. The first, the story of the poor widow, is an illustration of the human side, — how men ought to pray. The second parable, the story of the poor publican, illustrates the divine side of prayer, — how God answers prayer, and the kind of prayer which God will always answer.

In the parable before us we find another story of our Lord, in which once more this power of importunate prayer is set forth. What is the point of difference between this story of the importunate neighbor and the story of the importunate widow? In the parable of the importunate widow the prayer is emphasized as it touches our own needs and wants. In the story of the importunate neighbor this power of prayer as it touches the needs of others is the lesson. The poor widow sought justice for herself, the poor neighbor who thundered at the door of the next

house sought bread for another man. In other words, we have before us the power of intercessory prayer, — the power of prayer offered on behalf of the needs of some one other than ourselves. That is one of the most mysterious features of prayer, — that God will hear the prayers of His people on behalf of some one in whom they are interested. God does hear the prayers of the parent for the prodigal child. God does hear the prayers of friends for the dying soul. God does hear the intercession that the Church lifts up for the starving heathen. But still more than that, this poor neighbor is used by our Saviour as a type of those who seek the power of the Holy Spirit. “How much more,” our Saviour says, in summing up the moral of the story, — “how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask.”

Now, before passing on to the definite lessons which this parable teaches, let us try to get fairly before us the story as our Saviour told it and as it appealed to the imagination and popular fancy of his hearers. Here we notice in this parable that element of delicate humor which sparkles in the story of the importunate widow. We come in touch with what I will call the geniality of Christ. Who can doubt that He used this humorous setting in order to press home to the hearts of the simplest the tremendous reality of importunate prayer? Here, then, you

have a picture of a good-natured, generous, hospitable man, who has gone to bed. He is one of those people who live from hand to mouth. He has just enough in the house to supply immediate needs, but never has anything over for an emergency. But he is one of those people to whom travelers and wayfarers always turn for shelter and welcome. They always know that his good-nature and his generosity can be trusted. Near by, in an adjoining house, this man has a neighbor, a thrifty soul, who has a large family, as our Saviour points out, but who notwithstanding has always plenty in his larder. One night, after both these men had retired to rest, a wayfarer, a traveling merchant perhaps, belated, who had lost his way, arrives in the village. And, true to the traditions of the place, he seeks shelter and finds it in the home of the happy-go-lucky, hospitable, but thriftless man. He is welcomed cordially, but to his host's despair there is absolutely nothing, not a crumb, in the house to set before the hungry guest. But the host's reputation for hospitality is not going to be lost if he can help it. So, while the stranger washes himself, the host rushes off to his friend next door, begging supplies for the simple meal. The difficulty in his way in such circumstances was twofold: in the first place, how to awaken the man who was asleep, and in the next place, how to induce him to get up after he was awak-

ened and give him what he wanted. Both of these difficulties are outlined by our Saviour in the parable. To the repeated hammerings at the outside door a muffled, sleepy reply is made: "Don't trouble me," or, more literally, "Don't bother me." The word in the original is a word indicating impatience, annoyance, such as one experiences who is awakened from sound sleep. Then, as the thundering at the door still continues, the poor host outside experiences the second difficulty of the situation. The man in bed is awake, but he does n't want to get up. He pleads two very good reasons, which in ordinary circumstances should have been sufficient as to why he should have been excused. In the first place, the door, he says, is shut. And when you remember what an Eastern door was, and the complication of its heavy bolts and bars, something very different from our modern Yale lock, you can realize that there was a pretty tedious job involved to get up and open the door. But that was not all. There was a second reason even more urgent. "The children," he says, "are with me in bed." As though the poor man has said, "I have got them all asleep, and now if you rouse me they will all wake again, and who knows when I will get them settled to sleep once more?" There is a wonderful touch of pathos and humor. "The children are with me in bed." Any parent who has had an experience of a

wakeful child can appreciate the difficulty of this poor man who pleaded in the middle of the night to be left alone. But the man outside the door is determined. He still thunders with repeated blows. His character as a host is at stake. There is a hungry man in his house who won't sleep until he gets something to eat. By all the rules of hospitality and by all the plea of a desperate necessity he keeps hammering at the door, until finally, with curses and maledictions, the man rises, not because he is his friend, — I dare say that from that night the friendship between these two neighbors ceased, — but because of his importunity he rises and gives him — what? The man had asked three loaves, a very simple request, but what does he get? ¹ He gives him as many things as he needed. I dare say you can picture that man going back in the middle of the night, laden down, not with three loaves, but with perhaps half a dozen, a cluster of raisins, two or three bunches of figs, and a bag of new wine. While the other poor man is left behind shutting the door with all its cumbersome locks, and then getting the children to sleep, the host and his guest sit through the night enjoying the feast which importunity had succeeded in procuring.

Just a moment on that word “importunity.” In the experience of the widow our Saviour de-

¹ See the Revised Version.

liberately used a slang word, which, translated in our Revised Version "Lest she wear me out," means literally, in its usual meaning, "Lest she hit me in the eye," give me a black eye. So here in this word "importunity" our Saviour uses a word that occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. If it is not a slang word, it is very like it. It means literally shamelessness, impudence, and I would myself venture to say *cheekiness*. It was not simply impertinent, but shameless impudence, on the part of his importunate neighbor, that induced this man at last to get up.

What is the lesson of all this? Is this a picture of how God answers prayer? Did our Saviour mean to imply that our Heavenly Father so grudgingly yields at last to the urgency of human needs? Are we to find here a parallel of the way in which God gives His blessings to the hungry soul? Surely not. Once more we have our prayer illustrated from the human side. This is not a picture of how God answers prayer, but how man should offer prayer. This is a picture of that spirit of intensity which under all circumstances is the characteristic of prevailing prayer. And it is in the absence of that note of persistency, it is in a lack of perseverance, that we find to-day the secret of so much weakness and deadness in our churches.

We may gather up the lessons of this story by looking at it from these three standpoints:

First, from the standpoint of the suppliant, the man who knocks; second, from the standpoint of the prayer he offered; and third, from the standpoint of the thing which he sought.

First, from the standpoint of the suppliant. You have here a picture of the soul that prays in real earnest. This man was absolutely helpless. He tells his needs right out. He makes no apology for his condition. "I have nothing" is his plea. So it is this sense of need that is so necessary in all our petitions. Many of us have so abundantly the good things of this life that we forget how desperate is our need of those spiritual blessings which only God can give. The first condition of success in our prayers is to realize that that bread of life for which our souls and the souls of our fellowmen are hungering comes only from God. Yet how many of us really pray for that bread of life? How little real soul hunger there is! I dare say if this unfortunate man were to follow the methods of some of our modern Christians he might have suggested to his guest, "I have got nothing for you to eat in the house, but I have a bathroom and I have a gymnasium and I have an excellent library. Suppose we spend the night in gymnastic exercises, and then let us go into the library and let us read the current literature." How do you suppose it would have satisfied the hunger of that poor starving wretch? And yet that is exactly

what we are doing to-day. We run our missions very largely on the line of gymnasiums and reading-rooms. I am not saying that these things are not splendid in their place, but these things are useless until we have been on our knees before God, pleading first for the bread of life. Medical missions, hospitals, colleges, institutional churches, and all the mechanism of modern Christianity are excellent in their places. But let us take care lest they be made opiates, so to speak, which deaden the real soul hunger for that bread which cometh down from heaven.

There is another feature about this suppliant. His prayer was specific in its quest. "Give me three loaves," he said. He knew exactly what he wanted. Two loaves perhaps for the hungry man who had just arrived, and one over for himself. Is not this element of directness another condition of successful prayer? Many of our prayers are like letters which are insufficiently addressed. They get lost in the Dead-Letter Office of Heaven. There is not sufficient direction about them. They are a bundle of generalities. Now, when you remember, as I said at the outset, that the Scripture records thirty-four special prayers, all answered, why should we hesitate to test by urgency God's power and willingness to give what we need?

Once more, there is one other feature in this suppliant, and that was his expectancy. He ham-

mered at that door not despairingly. He had a shrewd idea that before morning that thrifty soul would get up and give him what he needed. How many of us really expect an answer? How many of us wait for God as they who wait on the morning? Yet it is this expectant attitude of the soul resting upon the Divine promise that triumphs over hindrances. There is a wonderfully beautiful example of that in the life of Charles Kingsley. When a young man, he had become engaged to a beautiful girl to whom he had given his whole love. But her parents deemed him an unsuitable match, and they forbade absolutely all communication between the two young people for, I think, two years. These two years were to Kingsley the darkest and most terrible in his life. But in his diary he tells us that during that period he lived on one verse, Mark xi. 24, "Therefore I say unto you what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Before the two years were over, Kingsley's prayer was answered, and the girl became his wife; and there is no more beautiful story of married love, there is no more beautiful picture of a Christian family, than was created in the old rectory of Eversley, where Kingsley lived and died.

Second, look at this from the standpoint of the prayer which this man offered. It was fer-

vent, it was frequent, it was persevering, and, lastly, it was supremely unselfish. If you can find these four characteristics in your daily prayers, — fervency, frequency, perseverance, and unselfishness, — of you it shall be said, as it was said of Jacob, that he had power over the angel, and prevailed. Unselfishness in prayer — I want to see more of that in our Christian life. Think of the tremendous multitude around us and throughout the world who come knocking at our doors for the bread of life. And we have nothing to give them. Yet how many of us take refuge in prayer? How many, hearing the cry of starving humanity, go to the trouble of knocking at the gates of heaven for those blessings which God will give us to share with them? Let me plead for a more unselfish note in your daily supplications. Let each day's prayer witness you upon your knees wrestling for some one whose needs are great and whom only God can save.

Lastly, look at the thing for which this man sought. What he asked for was bread, the necessity of the moment; and that bread is used by our Saviour in this parable as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. "How much more," he says, "will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask?" It is this prayer for the Spirit's presence and power that the Church of Christ is waiting for to-day. Do you pray for

the descent of that Spirit of grace? If so, pray on. If it tarry, wait for it. It will surely come. Pentecost will be repeated when the Church with one accord abides penitently in intercessory prayer.

XXIII

A PLEA FOR THE SIMPLE LIFE

Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth. — MATTHEW vi. 31, 32.

IN 1803 William Wordsworth, the great English poet, then a young man and comparatively unknown, wrote a sonnet entitled "Plain Living and High Thinking." It is so significant that I quote it in full:

"O friend, I know not which way I must look
For comfort, being as I am opprest
To think that now our life is only drest
For show; mean handiwork of craftsman, cook,
Or groom! We must run glittering, like a brook
In the open sunshine, or we are unblest!
The wealthiest man among us is the best!
No grandeur now in Nature or in book
Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense —
This is idolatry, and these we adore.
Plain living and high thinking are no more —
The homely beauty of the good old cause
Is gone — our peace, our simple innocence,
And pure religion, breathing household laws."

The remarkable thing about these lines is that, although describing the follies of a hundred years

ago, they are exactly applicable to the conditions of life to-day. What Wordsworth criticised so forcefully in 1803 is still prevalent in 1903. In spite of the vaunted progress of the nineteenth century, notwithstanding the enormous advance in every sphere of human activity, it is a sad commentary on our civilization that to-day we are as much the slaves of vulgar ostentation as our fathers were when the last century still was young.

I need scarcely remind you how powerfully this same criticism of our over-elaborated life has been set forth in that remarkable little book by Charles Wagner, "The Simple Life." Everybody has read it and admired it, but not every one, I fear, is ready to accept its teaching. Wagner is a Protestant pastor in Paris, a man of keen sensibility, a prose poet, a shrewd philosopher and trenchant critic. In "The Simple Life" he puts forward a plea to his fellow Parisians precisely as Wordsworth did to his contemporaries a century ago. Like Wordsworth, Wagner sees in the elaboration and complexity of modern life not merely a menace to the stability of the state, but to the intellectual and spiritual life of the individuals who compose the state. Nowhere, surely, is this complex life of luxurious, pleasure-seeking extravagance so visible as in this metropolis of the New World. Everywhere the drags are off, and

the wheels of commerce and society are running wild. When the stoppage will come, as come it must, or how it will come, no one can tell; but that this career of extravagance in living, which New York has been following, especially for the past five years, is bound to end in catastrophe, moral and social, unless sanctified common sense interposes, it needs no prophet to predict. Already the shrewd, hard-headed men in Wall Street are scenting the approaching danger from the commercial standpoint. They tell us that the limit of over-capitalization and headstrong speculation is reached, and the reaction, unless it comes gradually and under proper control, will spell panic from the Atlantic to the Pacific. How true that may be as a commercial prediction, I do not know; but from the standpoint of religion, in the interests of morality, the evil results of this over-elaborated mode of living, common even among the poor as well as the rich, are already with us. One does not require the vision of a seer to recognize them.

It is an obvious inference that plain living is an absolute condition of high thinking. Strenuous thinking cannot come from pampered living. There can be no life of worthy thought where existence is loaded down with the vulgarities of luxury. Thought, which is the life of the soul, not only deteriorates, it dies when we make the cares of the body the be-all and

the end-all of our days. The two most illiterate classes in society to-day are the abject poor, who by necessity must think of the needs of the body and therefore can think of nothing else, and the idle rich, who by choice devote every hour of the day to the trivial problem of what they shall eat and what they shall drink and wherewithal they shall be clothed. "The body it is," says Bossuet, the great French preacher, in one of his sermons, "which drags us down from the loftier levels of thought, which chains us to the earth when we ought to be breathing the pure air of heaven." So it is that to-day we are putting an undue emphasis upon the merely outward life. We are elaborating the mere framework of the picture, ornamenting the gilded trappings, indifferent to the essentials which alone give lasting beauty to life and character.

What are some of the causes of this over-elaboration in the material comforts of life?

Primarily, there is the passion for luxury itself. We are to-day essentially a luxurious race. The pitiful thing is that we are proud of it. We boast about our luxury as something that lifts us above other nations. You meet people, for example, who go abroad, and when they return what is the burden of their conversation? Not to tell you of beautiful scenes of nature which they have visited, but to complain that, having gone abroad confessedly for change, they did not find anything

exactly the same and just as comfortable as at their own fireside. They criticise the temperature of the houses and vividly describe to you the horrors of shivering in a temperature a little below the fever heat in which they live at home. They denounce the cooking and complain because at an altitude of five thousand feet in the Alps they did not find the delicacies which they were able to enjoy six months before the season in their own New York homes. We may smile at such things, and yet it is this craving for luxury that is destructive of high thinking. It produces a mental imbecility which is unable to appreciate those truths which give dignity to life and add strength to character.

What is luxury? It may be defined as whatever is costly and superfluous. And it is this craving for what is costly and superfluous that is making this city a hotbed of extravagance.

Of course, not everything is superfluous which is costly. Luxury is to be distinguished from good taste, and it is certainly not to be confounded with high art. There is a sense in which things once regarded as luxuries are to-day rightly looked upon as necessities. That is so because life has advanced rationally and its outward wants have so far become more varied. An English writer, for example, in 1577, denounces the effeminacy of his age because people were introducing chimneys instead of allowing the smoke

to escape by the door, and were beginning to use vessels of earthenware in place of the old-fashioned wooden utensils. "Formerly," he says, "houses were of willow and men were of oak; nowadays houses are of oak and men are of willow."

But nevertheless the fact remains that in this foolish craving for things which are both costly and superfluous lies one fertile cause of the low-toned intellectual life of our time. Our passion for luxury is a mighty barrier in the way of "plain living and high thinking."

A second cause of this elaboration of life in our time is the spirit of social competition. Class vies with class for social supremacy. There is a vulgar ambition everywhere to "go one better" in the matter of functions and entertainments. Take, for instance, the case of a young married couple in good society, who have a certain limited income. One of two courses is open to them, either to give up all needless extravagance and devote themselves to building up a quiet home, or to give up the blessings of home life and hang on to the luxuries and pleasures of their set. Too often, under the spur of social competition, it is the latter course that is followed. Home life is deliberately, yes, and criminally, sacrificed for social life; and social life, so chosen, becomes the vestibule through which many a young husband passes into the prison house of debt. Un-

consciously often, such a man enters a race with his fashionable associates, and they, not his own personal comforts, create his standard of living. He must dress as well as they; he must entertain as lavishly as they; he must keep up the same pace as they. Meanwhile these associates of his are competing with another set just a little higher in the social scale, until society becomes a vulgar feverish competition, in which every bid for notoriety is pampered and every fine feeling is sacrificed. One has but to read the so-called society columns of any daily newspaper to witness the disgusting spectacle of this competitive spirit in the struggle for social supremacy. What place, under such conditions, is there for "plain living and high thinking"?

A third cause for the elaboration of the material side of life in our time is the undue craving for pleasure. The emphatic words are "undue craving." I am not advocating a sour puritanism or crabbed asceticism. Pleasure has, of course, its essential place in the scheme of right living, and to deny that place creates a reaction which, however ruinous, is inevitable. But in our time pleasure has become a tyranny. Its despotism has invaded every day of the week. It has no respect for time or seasons. It appeals to every passion of the soul, and by veiled suggestions it desecrates the holiest emotions of life. New York becomes every evening a vast Vanity Fair,

where irrational and too often degraded pleasure lures men and women by the thousand to its illicit shrine, and before that shrine "high thinking and plain living" are nightly immolated.

These are some of the things which stand in the way of the simple life here in New York. What are some of the perils which must inevitably result?

This life of luxury and extravagance intensifies class distinction. The poor man, unable to share in these wanton extravagances, chafes beneath the restrictions, and in hatred of his pampered betters bites at the ropes of separation. In Europe, where a certain hereditary distinction between the rich and the poor is recognized, this class bitterness is not so keen, but in a republic like ours, where every man feels himself as good as another, these ostentatious displays of luxurious extravagance become a hotbed of discontent in which anarchy and communism ferment. Some years ago a friend of mine was driving past one of the beautiful old homes in rural England, standing in its stately park. He asked the driver who lived there. "Oh," said the man, "we used to have lots of aristocratic company there. They had plenty of money and they spent it freely. We poor folks were well off then. But now the place belongs to a woman, and she is a Methodist, and everything is going to the bad." So spoke the countryman, and from his little view

this loss of luxury and extravagance was all wrong, even for the poor man. But meanwhile there was another side to the picture. That estate also included a large tenement district in one of the worst portions of London. In wretched hovels surrounded by saloons and low resorts the miserable people paid their rents, exorbitant for such quarters, and these rents supplied the funds for the luxury and extravagance of the former owner. But now what has happened? The lady who owns the estate to-day is using her revenues, not for her own luxury, but in bettering these homes, in driving out these saloons, and in creating a new spirit of respect and love between her and her tenants. A few country yokels get less to spend for drink, but a great city population has more real joy of living, and the bitter class distinction between wealth and poverty is lessened.

A second penalty that we must pay for our extravagant modes of life is that they create unnatural appetites. The essence of an unnatural appetite is that it demands a constant stimulus. It needs to be pampered by new sensations; and in the effort to satisfy this false and unnatural appetite, we are inventing forms of amusement so foolish that even pagan Rome might exclaim with wonder, "Behold, how these Christians amuse themselves!" Under such conditions, who cares for the simple manna of the wilderness, even

though it come down from God, if he can fill himself with the flesh-pots of Egypt, even though he make himself a slave to do so?

Once more, one other penalty must be paid, and that is the heaviest of all. This mode of life is absolutely at variance with the spirit of the teaching of Jesus Christ. It is pagan, not Christian; it is barbaric, not civilized. No man who is honest in his effort to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ can live a life whose only thought is to satisfy the merely sensuous desires. What is the one dominant note in the example of Him who when He walked this earth had not where to lay His head, but this: that we should live simply, that we should deny ourselves daily, taking no thought of what we shall eat or what we shall drink or wherewithal we shall be clothed, for our heavenly Father knoweth. The way of the Cross is the way of simple life; not the way of self-indulgence and vulgar extravagance, but the way which He walked with bleeding feet, is the path along which we alone can find the joy of plain living and high thinking.

For some of us this secret of the simple life cannot be learned. We have dwelt too long in the cellar of our appetites, and the reek of the kitchen is in our brains. We must die as we have lived, in the tyranny of those tastes which our surroundings have stimulated. For such of us plain living and high thinking are both alike

impossible. But there are our children. Please God we need not, unless our imbecility has become epidemic, condemn our offspring to this nightmare of extravagance which has so shriveled our own intelligence. We can at least ask God's grace to help us to train the new generations in

“That homely beauty of the good old cause,
 in simple innocence
And pure religion, breathing household laws.”

For them at least we can make the beauty of the simple life no poet's dream, but a divine evangel for the generation yet to come.

XXIV

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A SOUL

They believed His words, they sang His praise, they soon forgot His works, and lusted exceedingly in the wilderness. — PSALM cvi, 12-14.

WE have in these words an outline of four chapters in the biography of a soul. They believed His words, the chapter of faith; they sang His praise, the chapter of gratitude; they soon forgot, the chapter of indifference; they lusted exceedingly, the chapter of apostasy.

So swiftly spiritual experience oscillates between the poles of fervor and indifference. So easily we pass from our moments of high aspiration to our hours of groveling sin. How many of us have not some time or other written our spiritual biography in the terms of these four stages: belief, gratitude, forgetfulness, and indifference! In which one of these stages are we standing to-day? What record are you writing for angels to read upon the page of your spiritual experience? These are certainly personal questions. Each one of us must answer them for himself, but they are the kind of questions which

every man ought to face once in a while. So much of the average religious life of to-day is a drift anywhere. We are swayed by our emotions. And life that is governed by emotion is simply a bundle of incidents thrown together hap-hazard, lacking coherence; it has no stability, no depth, no growth.

I. They believed His word. So the first chapter in this biography of a soul begins. The Psalmist is speaking of the children of Israel. He is thinking of that hour in their history when God liberated them from the thralldom of Egypt; and in that moment of deliverance when God had so manifestly interposed in their history, they could not help but believe in His providence. I venture to say there is not a soul who cannot recall, at least once or twice, such hours of vivid deliverance, when God's power thrust itself into your life and made clear your path before you. It may require perhaps a certain effort on your part to remember just at once such times of Divine interposition, but they are there none the less. They come in different ways. Perhaps it was that day when some one dearer to you than life itself was lying on the borderland of death, when the doctors after their consultation went out silently from the hushed house, and you went up to your room and shut the door. Then, with sobs that shook you to the very heart, you knelt there and prayed

as you never prayed before and perhaps have never prayed since. You did not say "Thy will be done." You tried to, but you could not. You just prayed, with all the passion of a soul that shrank from the anguish of bereavement, that God would hear you and give you back, even for a little while, the life that seemed to be slipping from your grasp. Then the miracle took place. What man could not do, what science hardly believed could be done, God did. Next morning, when the tides of life began to flow again, you believed in God's word. And that morning, for once at least in your life, you believed in the power of prayer. All that day, and perhaps for many days, your soul sang out the second chapter in this biography of a soul. You sang God's praises. Gratitude to God, that had been bedridden in your soul for years, was on your lips continually.

Or it may be that this Divine interposition in life comes through deliverance from some great temptation. I have in my possession two letters from a man (and he not the only one) in one of which in apparent agony he asked me to pray for him to be saved from the scandal and disclosure of an act of folly. I do not know in this instance the particulars. But in a second letter, written some time after, he speaks of God's great mercy to him, that he has been saved from the ruin he had merited but had feared so greatly.

However you may regard such an experience, it is not so uncommon as you may think. There are lives openly respectable to-day, yet in whose past a dark secret lies buried, which, had not the Divine mercy covered it, would have meant ruin and desolation. And surely, if ever there is a moment in life when a man or woman can believe in God, it is when in this way the penal effects of sin are remitted. I do not say the moral effects, but the penal effects. If there is ever a time when a man should sing his song of praise, it is after such a deliverance.

Or it may be that God reveals Himself in a human life in saving from some great personal peril. I have known personally three different men, unknown to each other, who were the sole survivors in accidents which caused the death of their comrades — two in cases of drowning and one in case of fire. All of them for a few terrible moments looked death squarely in the face, and yet at the last moment by some mysterious providence they were saved, and they are alive to-day. Strangely enough, only one of them is a professing Christian, so quickly they forgot; and he, poor soul, has been an almost lifelong victim of the drink habit, although now apparently mastering it. In the autobiography of a public citizen there was a similar experience of deliverance from imminent death. "I landed at New York," says Mr. Hewett, in describing

his deliverance from shipwreck in midwinter, "in a borrowed suit of sailor's clothing, and I had just three silver dollars in my pocket, — my entire worldly wealth. I was then twenty-two years of age, and that accident was the turning-point in my life. It taught me for the first time not only that I could stand in the face of death without fear and without shrinking, but it also taught me that my life, which had been so miraculously rescued, belonged not to me. And from that hour I gave it to the work which from that time has been in my thoughts, — the welfare of my fellow citizens." Well, such examples in different ranges of experience might be multiplied. But the point is that into every life there come sooner or later certain solemn moments when God thus vividly reveals His power. It is one of the great laws of experience. God claims the right to vindicate Himself in every life by some such startling deliverance, when the soul is compelled to say, "I believe in God."

Now, I am not saying that that is the highest kind of faith. I am very far from asserting that a man must thus be shaken out of himself and stripped of every earthly help in order to trust and love his Saviour. What I do say is that God does thus write with the pen of startling deliverance this first chapter in the biography of a soul. And most of us who have experienced such de-

liverances have written the second chapter in that spiritual biography, the chapter of praise. I don't know anything more beautiful than he who has thus come out of such a deliverance writing in his deeds of love and charity his record of gratitude. There is a new light on his face, a new song in his heart. Ah, you who have come out of great tribulation in this life, are you writing on loving hearts and struggling lives this second chapter, gratitude to God?

But then comes the other side of all this, the story of forgetfulness and indifference. They believed His words, they sang His praises, but they soon forgot Him. Literally, they *made haste* to forget Him. The vividness of their faith was obliterated by the suddenness of their indifference. How evanescent is human gratitude! "Some men," says Joseph Parker, "have wonderful power of absorption. They take any number of favors, and never remember one of them." And it is just here that we touch the subtlety of sin. Men die spiritually, not by openly blaspheming God, not by deliberately denying Him, not by outrageous breaking of the Ten Commandments, but simply by forgetting Him. God is not in their thoughts. He has no recognition in their lives. They feel no sense of obligation to Him. They take each day's blessings as though they were theirs by right. And yet they are not atheists; they have simply forgotten.

How does this forgetfulness of God betray itself? In one way at least, in that violation of the sanctity of the Sabbath which is so common. I am sometimes asked by people whether it is wrong to play golf on Sunday, wrong to attend social functions, wrong, in short, to make Sunday a secular holiday. To these questions I have simply to say this: The real point at issue is not whether it is wrong to do this or that; the point is, Is it right to forget God on the one day in which He asks us to remember Him? Has God any claims on your life? If so, how far can you or I acknowledge that claim if we deliberately use the day for mere selfish dissipation which He has asked us to observe for the acknowledgment of His goodness and mercy? One would think that the very conditions in which nine tenths of society live in New York would make the Sabbath as a day of rest all the more necessary. "I have not a moment to myself; I have not even time to think; I am on the go all the time," and so on, — these are the constant cries we hear. And yet deliberately we take the one day on which we can think, and throw it into the whirlpool of dissipation. I say it with all deliberation and seriousness, the great tragedy of New York life this afternoon and evening will not be that some of us will live to the flesh in our wines and dinners; not that some of us will live for pleasure in our receptions and entertainments;

not that some of us will live for dissipation in other forms of amusement, — it is not in these things in themselves that the real tragedy of religion in New York will be found this afternoon, but that behind all these things lies, like a black cloud, the sin of a people forgetting their God, forgetting Him to whom we owe everything and on whom alone our eternal life depends. For multitudes of people in our city to-day the only chapter in the biography of a soul that is being written, and written with words of doom, is this, “They made haste to forget Him.”

But of course these are not the only ways, by any means, in which our forgetfulness of God betrays itself. How little, for example, of acknowledgment of God the average business man makes when year after year he adds new profits to his credit! On the ledger of his soul how often does he make an entry to represent his indebtedness to God? Yet when things were at panic tension and credit was tight, that man prayed night and morning that God would pull him through. Then he believed in God. To-day he forgets Him. Or how seldom the public man who has attained success, or the man who after long delay has at last secured the coveted prize, thinks of openly declaring his obligation to the Divine blessing for his success! He thanks his constituents for their confidence, and pays generously to a campaign fund, but he forgets God. Nay,

when you come to think of it, how little of the spirit of ordinary thanksgiving finds utterance in our common daily life. Even our prayers have in them far more of our wants than the remembrance of God's blessing. We ask for this and that, and we forget even with our lips, and far more with our lives, to acknowledge Him who has so richly remembered us. So, I repeat, the most insidious peril of the spiritual life of our day is this sin of forgetfulness of God. Our lives are laden with tokens of His love, and our hearts are stripped of every symbol of our gratitude. What is the cause of it all? It is the elaboration of the mere framework of life. We are busy in dressing up the externals, and we are forgetting the essentials. Instead of painting the picture, we are intent only upon ornamenting the tinsel frame. The great need of our time is a simpler life, for, after all, it is only as we get back to that simpler life that we realize the tawdriness of the vulgar ostentation with which so much of the social condition of our time is disfigured.

Then, again, do we realize how this sin of forgetting God is enormously aggravated by the ignorance of God of those who come as aliens into our country? Do we realize that in one year out of 648,000 emigrants landed here, 165,000 could neither read nor write, and that in the year before out of 487,000 emigrants 117,000 were absolutely illiterate? I am not a pessimist

by any means, but I refuse to be an optimist simply by shutting my eyes to facts. And in these two facts, forgetfulness of God and ignorance of God, lies a menace to the spiritual and temporal welfare of our country. Do you suppose that God is indifferent to this forgetfulness? Is it a simple thing, do you think, to the great heart of eternal love that we, the daily recipients of His bounty, should flout it and ignore it? Ah! it seems to me as if our Heavenly Father could forgive any sin but this sin of ingratitude.

Our text speaks of a fourth chapter in the biography of a soul. "They lusted exceedingly in the wilderness." Forgetfulness passed by a natural stage into apostasy. When the psalm of gratitude ceased, the discord of sin began. The soul must feed on something. If you starve it of God, it must find sustenance away from God. And that is what the Psalmist means when he says, "Their soul lusted exceedingly." It craved other food. Its passions demanded other sustenance. So inevitably sin creates an unnatural and unsatisfied appetite. It begins by making us forget God, and it ends by making us crave for that which makes the very thought of God distasteful. So the tragic schism between the soul and its Maker is rendered complete.

Have you ever thought how swiftly the law of degeneration works throughout all nature? For example, according to the teaching of evolu-

tion, it has taken millions of years for man simply as a physical being to grow slowly upward from the first form of life to his present stature. You and I in our bodies represent the slow evolution of millions of years of upward growth. Yet in five years of drunkenness and licentiousness any one of us can degenerate to the level of the beast. It took millions of years to evolve us upward. It takes less than five years to plunge us downward lower than the point at which we began. Leave God out of your life, and evolution spells devolution. Put God into your life, and evolution spells revolution, which is regeneration.

Dr. Carpenter, the well-known naturalist and friend of Darwin, in describing some strange forms of life that were brought to light from the bed of the Atlantic Ocean by the Challenger Dredging Expedition, speaks of one dwarfed and deformed creature as being the lowest form of a highly developed organism found in England; then he adds: "It is simply the case of an animal that has been going to the bad for millions of years." Think of it! Science recognizing degeneration in a tiny animal away down in the bed of the ocean, and degeneration going on for millions of years! Through untold ages this little organism has been growing more dwarfed and deformed and degraded. Well, if degeneration is so easily possible for the very lowest forms of

life, how much more possible must it be for the soul that in forgetting God becomes the victim of its lowest desires! "They lusted exceedingly."

Such is the biography of a soul as our text sketches it. Suppose that you and I have been writing this kind of a record, the question, and the practical question, is, Is it possible for a man to rewrite these two chapters of forgetfulness and apostasy into records of service and fellowship with God? It is just here that the gospel meets us. If I did not believe that the power of God could thus enable a man to rewrite his life from the starting-point of repentance and in the power of a Divine faith, I should not stand here this morning. It is the glory of the gospel that it takes the most helpless man and it tells him that through penitence and faith he can rewrite the biography of his soul so that the dark chapters of the past will be forever wiped out, and in their place the fair record of a soul redeemed and forgiven inserted. No matter how dark the past may be, no matter how indelibly the record of our forgetfulness and apostasy may have been written, there is with God the power for every man to efface by rewriting in the future the story of his forgiveness and redemption.

You remember the beautiful little poem entitled "A New Leaf," in which the teacher learned the lesson from her pupil asking her for a fresh copy:

“He came to my desk with a quivering lip,
The lesson was done;
‘Dear teacher, I want a new leaf,’ he said,
‘I have spoiled this one.’
In place of the leaf so stained and blotted,
I gave him a new one, all unspotted,
And into his sad eyes smiled,
‘Do better now, my child.’

“I went to the throne with a sin-stained soul,
The old year was done;
‘Dear Father, hast thou a new leaf for me?
I have spoiled this one.’
He took the old leaf, stained and blotted,
And gave me a new one, all unspotted,
And into my sad heart smiled,
‘Do better now, my child.’”

XXV

RELIGION IN HOMESPUN

He judged the cause of the poor and needy, then it was well with him: was not this to know Me? saith the Lord. — JEREMIAH xxii. 16.

If any man will do His will, He shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. — JOHN vii. 17.

IN the discussion of religious questions to-day hardly anything is more persistent than the demand for what is called a practical religion. The hard-headed man of to-day tells you he has no place for a religion that is set forth like a problem in logic or worked out like a proposition in mathematics. On the contrary, what he wants is a faith that will help him to meet the stress and strain of common life, that finds its proof in daily experience and is vindicated not by what men say, but by what a man does. In a word, the demand to-day is for a religion in common life.

Personally, I do not know anything healthier than just that demand. It is a distinct advance when men begin to regard their religion, not as a Sunday liability, but as a week-day asset; not as an obligation to be discharged by a per-

functory attendance at church, but as an inspiration to be realized in the duties of daily life. The question, therefore, is, — and I am going to answer it if I can this morning, — How is such a religion to be obtained? Where are we to discover the secret of that faith that will become a controlling influence in common life?

Here, then, in our Old Testament text we have a pen-and-ink portrait, just a swift sketch of one man who solved this problem and made his religion a distinct contribution to his every-day happiness. “He judged the cause of the poor and needy” — that was Josiah’s life record, and what were the results? It was well with him. “Was not this to know me? saith the Lord.” Josiah came to know God, not by speculating about God, but through the kindly deeds of an unselfish life. He found God, not in a ready-made creed, but in a hand-made life of generous action. He wrought

“With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More high than all poetic thought.”

In other words, Josiah’s knowledge of God was influenced by his life. It was what he did in common life that determined what he believed.

Josiah anticipated, therefore, the great truth of our Saviour when he said, “If any man will do the will of God, he shall know the doctrine,

whether it be of God." The knowledge of the doctrine according to Christ comes through the doing of the will. Life anticipates creed; doing is the condition of knowing in religious things. Paley has summed up this view of the Scripture regarding religion in common life in his famous aphorism, "In the things of man by knowing we come to love, but in the things of God it is by loving that we come to know."

It is perhaps well to remember just at this point that this is an aspect of religion that runs through the whole Bible. Matthew Arnold once said, truly enough, that "Conduct is three-fourths of life." Well, emphatically the Bible is the book of conduct. As a matter of fact, the Bible is not a bundle of speculations. It is, all in all, the most intensely practical book in all literature, and the strangely worded dogmas that have been drawn from it are due more to human perversity than Divine inspiration. Take, for example, that magnificent burst of the prophet Micah, "What doth the Lord require of thee, O man, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before thy God?" Or take that equally practical definition of religion of Saint James, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Finally, we have these words of the Saviour

Himself which I have taken as part of our text, "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." With them take the other oft-quoted words whose beauty no familiarity robs, "I was an-hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Josiah judged the cause of the poor and needy. Pascal pithily puts this same truth in an answer to the French infidel who had said to him, "If I had your principles, I should be a better man"; to which Pascal replied, "Begin by being a better man and you will soon have my principles." Our two texts therefore present the working ideal of religion in the homespun of common life.

The first practical lesson suggested by these words is that the life, the quality of a man's daily thought and action, has a tremendous reactionary influence on his beliefs. Let me illustrate this from the negative standpoint. I know a man whose antecedents were all religious, but he cannot become a Christian because he does not believe certain truths in the Bible. There are, he claims, certain difficulties in the record of Scripture which he cannot harmonize to his satisfaction, and for that reason he stands outside the Church of Christ. Now, the man who takes that

position may be honest or dishonest. If he is dishonest, his intellectual doubts are of course simply a cloak to hide moral baseness. He says he cannot believe some things in the Bible for the very good reason that there are other things he dare not believe. He waxes eloquent over what he calls the mistakes of Moses in order to cover up the sins of himself. He denies Christ's truth with his lips because he has already denied Christ's law with his life. For that man, the man who masquerades in his doubts to hide his sins, there is nothing to be said. Religious cant may be bad, but religious recant is a good deal worse. But with the honest doubter, the man who is in sympathy with the spirit of the gospel but who feels the difficulty of accepting certain doctrines, what are you to do? Has the Church of Christ any warrant in shutting that man out of the fold, denying him the privileges of membership and branding him as one who is not a Christian? Too often, alas, that is just what has been done. Intellectual doubt has been treated as though it were moral evil. Surely, if we are true to the teaching of Christ, what we want to tell that man is that religion begins, not in an elaborated creed, but in a sanctified will. Spiritual life begins in the soul's willingness to do the will of God. Are you willing to judge the cause of the poor and needy? Are you willing to visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction?

Are you willing to love mercy, to do justly, and walk humbly with your God? Then, on that willingness, on that disposition in your heart to do the Divine will, God receives you as a follower of Christ, and to you He speaks the gracious promise, "You shall know the doctrine, whether it be of God."

Perhaps this may become clearer if we look at it from the negative standpoint and see how a man without this willingness of heart inevitably shuts God out of his life. If to judge the cause of the poor and the needy was to know God, then to crush the poor and the needy must be to deny God and exclude His presence from the soul. And here, friends, is the sad thing, that a man can do all that — oppress the poor and the helpless by selfishness and indifference — and yet be so orthodox in creed that the whole assembly of Westminster divines would pass him for a first-class diploma in divinity. Orthodoxy is often only another name for undigested theology. It does not necessarily follow, by any means, that if any man know the doctrine he will do the will. Nay, on the contrary, where the will is self-centered, and the disposition of the soul turns only on the pivot of its own desires, it is then that religion begins to dissolve into nebulous mists. Now, here is the message for each one of us. We want to know God, we would see Jesus, we desire His spirit, we want to grow into

His likeness; and all these desires turn on the answer we give to this simple practical question, Are you willing to do His will? But perhaps some one may say here, before a man can be willing to do God's will he must first be a believer of God? Is not this promise of Christ spoken really to those who are already believers? No, Christ's promises are for all mankind, and one of the most beautiful things in these words is their universality. "If any man." There is no bound set. Jew or Greek, heathen or barbarian, pagan or Christian, they stand within the sunlight of this blessed promise, there is room and welcome for all. If any man is willing to do God's will as that will is revealed to him, this promise is spoken, "he shall know God"; the Father will reveal Himself to His child.

That, then, is our first point: the first great essential in practical religion is willingness to do God's will. The second point I emphasize is that the object of all religion must be the knowledge of God's will. To do the will of God we must study what that will is and what it claims from us. And here, perhaps, we touch what has been a distinctive weakness in our Christian teaching and preaching. We have been too eager to impress certain doctrines about God and too lax in teaching the will of God. Think how much energy has been lost, how much Christian harmony has been destroyed, in wrangling over

dogmas, which are purely matters of speculation, instead of, as we ought, gathering together in lowly submission to learn God's will. For, after all, what is it that men come to church for? Primarily to worship God, but secondarily to know the will of God. The question that each one ought to ask himself, as he comes into the sanctuary on the Sabbath morning, is, What is God's will for me? How am I to do God's will throughout this week? And how sad it is that so often that question is never answered! Even in our prayers is it not the case that when we say "Thy will be done" we do so with a kind of gulp in our throat, as though God's will were a kind of tyranny, a dread nemesis, that we must submit to as best we can. We are not unlike the woman on shipboard in a raging storm who, having asked the captain if there was any danger and received the answer "God's will be done," replied, "Surely, things are not as bad as that." Now, friends, it is the ignorance of God's will that is the great stumbling-block in the way of practical religion, — trying to do our own will in harmony with God's will. What I want to emphasize is, that the will of God is the will of a father for his child, a will whose every heart-beat is love, — love infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. What God wills is only the best, and is it a hard thing to ask that the end and aim of all our lives should be willingness to do

that will of our Heavenly Father? True, indeed, it is that there are times when we must obey that will in darkness of soul, in dumb amazement; but in that hour this promise shines clear as a star, "He that is willing to do the will shall know the doctrine."

Just take here one or two verses from Scripture which emphasize what God's will is. In writing to Timothy Paul says, "God our Saviour willeth to have all men to be saved and come into the knowledge of the truth." Again, in writing to the Thessalonians, he says, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." And again in the same Epistle he writes, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you." Or, again, "For it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish." And so all through Scripture a study of God's will reveals to us the depth and intensity of His love; and I am convinced that a more faithful study of this Word of God on the part of each one of us will intensify more and more that willingness to do His will which is the essential mark of religion in common life.

Notice the effect of this view of religion. Its effect may be traced in three ways: First, on ourselves; second, on the Church; and third, on the world. The result in ourselves will be to deepen our peace and to give us a closer knowl-

edge of God. Josiah the king experienced this: "Then it was well with me, and was not this to know God?" It is in this service, indeed, amongst our brethren, in stretching out hands of helpfulness and speaking words of sympathy, that God's glory shines within our hearts. It is well with our souls, things dark to us become clear, mysteries are unveiled, and new regions of spiritual experience are opened. Truths that to some of us to-day seem vague and indefinite — as, for example, the truth of Christ's presence real and living in the soul, which to some of us may seem like a fiction — will become living and real in personal experience, as we go forth humbly to do the will of God in daily life.

The effect of this view of religion on the Church will be to bring the churches more closely together in unity of spirit and unity of effort. For, after all, what are the dividing lines that separate the churches of Christendom to-day? Are they not essentially impractical, or at any rate irrelevant? Do they touch in any way this question of the soul's willingness to do the will of God? No doubt, in the creeds of the varied churches there are various definitions of religion. In one church religion consists in belief in a dogma, in another church it is the acceptance of a form, in another church it is submission to a government, in another church it is a belief in a historic past; but no church so far as it is a denomination stands

alone for its willingness to do the will of God. There is the only ground of unity for the denominations of Christendom to-day. It is not in drawing up articles of compromise, it is not by one church saying to another, "We will surrender so much of our government if you will surrender so much of your creed," that the severed ranks of Christendom will come together. What is needed for Christian unity is not compromise, but submission to the will of God.

And then, lastly, note the effect of a practical religion on the world. When the Christian stands before the world as a living example of God's will, as a man whose one aim is to do God's will in common life, in judging the cause of the poor and the needy, in visiting the widow and the fatherless, the world will find a stronger and more convincing argument for the truth of Christ's evangel than in all the creeds that were ever made or in all the sermons that were ever preached. There will be no fear of the truth of Christianity being questioned when men are found willing to do the will of Christ, and hence I make this appeal to each one: For the sake of your Saviour who has redeemed you, for the sake of the world which watches you, for the sake of your own peace and joy, seek to attain a religion that reveals itself in common life, a religion whose creed begins in a sanctified will, in the willingness to do the will of God in daily life.

XXVI

THE MAN WITHOUT A CHANCE

Why stand ye here all the day idle? — MATTHEW XX. 6.

USUALLY these words are regarded as a question of rebuke. The master of the vineyard is pictured, according to the common idea, in a towering rage when he said to these unfortunates of the eleventh hour, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" as though it were some fault of theirs that they were doing nothing at the fag end of the day. But, as a matter of fact, the words were spoken, not in rebuke, but in a spirit of infinite tenderness. The whole parable turns on the pitiful condition of these eleventh-hour workmen. They were men without a chance. Willing to work, eager to work, they were not idle by choice but through necessity. They typify the overlooked people in the banquet of life,—men for whom there is no place at the feast of success, and who, standing just outside the threshold, smell success but never taste it. It was on behalf of such men that Christ spoke. This story vindicates His interest in the man without a chance. It was part of the Divine optimism of Jesus that He hoped to the last. His

message was a thrill of hopefulness for the last man; His gospel was salvation to the uttermost.

Very different is the world's estimate. According to our standards the man without a chance receives too often nothing but our contempt, and no doubt often enough he deserves nothing but contempt. Here, indeed, is where the modern world and Christ are in sharp antagonism. Evolution stands for the survival of the fittest; Christ stands for the survival of the unfittest. The modern world lays its crowns of glory upon the man who not only feels fit but is fit. For him its best prizes are reserved. It has no place, no thought, for the unfit soul. But with Christ it was the waifs of humanity, the Magdalenes, the prodigal sons, the penitent thieves, who called forth His tenderest concern and roused His most hopeful consideration.

Let us consider these eleventh-hour workers, the men who stood idle all day but for whom joy came at sundown.

The scene in which the text is placed is common enough. It is a scene not confined to Christ's time, but is perhaps even more common to-day in our Western life. You may see it at this present moment in London. It is said that there are upwards of fifteen thousand unemployed men in the East End of London just now, involving a population of sixty thousand in

distress. The parish councils are busy organizing relief works to give temporary work for a portion of these men. In the shipbuilding districts of Newcastle in the North of England there are seven thousand men out of work just now, representing a population of nearly thirty thousand suffering more or less from the lack of a regular wage. Surely there is no spectacle that so wrings our sympathies as that of a multitude of men, gaunt and hungry, eager for work, yet unable to find it. I well remember when such a condition obtained in the city of Glasgow some twenty years ago. On my way to the University I used to pass, about seven o'clock in the morning, a large vacant space where the city authorities had collected a mass of stones to be broken by the unemployed. I forget now just how many were thus provided for day by day, but the numbers applying for the work were far beyond the limit, and nothing was more pitiable, more heart-rending, than to see the disappointed men, unable to secure a place in the yard, hanging around, with pinched faces, waiting for the chance of being called on at a later hour. Some of them stood in the bitter winter air, thinly clad, poorly fed, waiting hour after hour, in the hope of even a half-day's job. Skilled workmen many of them were, some of them educated and accustomed to refinement, yet in the stress of the time willing to do anything — to break stone by the roadside

— so as to provide for the wife and children at home.

It was such a scene as this that presented itself to our Saviour when early one morning He came into the square, the market-place of Capernaum. The pathos of the scene appealed to Him at once. There, spade in hand, gathered in the market-place, were the day laborers, waiting for a job. At the first hour, seven o'clock, a certain number were engaged. A bargain was struck, and happy in their good luck away they went to the neighboring vineyard. At the third hour, nine o'clock, a few more were taken on; at noon still a few more were engaged; and even at three o'clock opportunity was still found for one or two more. Yet still in the shadowy square, where all day long the hot Eastern sun had beaten down, now growing gray in the waning light of approaching sundown, there still waited a forlorn handful of unemployed men. For eleven hours and more they had stood there with hope deferred, hungry and anxious, thinking of wife and children at home for whom there was nothing, because they had found no work. They were still standing idle at the eleventh hour.

It was that handful of belated, hopeless, despairing men, standing there in the market-place in the fag end of the day without a chance, that seemed to lift up before the prophetic thought of Christ that vast multitude in all ages who

somehow lose their chance in the great business of life. They are not literally idle, perhaps, but they have lost their place where they had planned for it. They have been crowded out of the race of life, they have been passed over in the distribution of its prizes. Their ambitions have been baffled, their hopes brought to nothing. You remember how Oliver Wendell Holmes has described them:

“A few can touch the magic string,
 And noisy fame is proud to own them;
 Alas for those who never sing,
 But die with all their music in them.

“Then grieve not for the dead alone
 Whose song has told their hearts' sweet story;
 Weep for the voiceless, who have known
 The cross without the crown of glory.

“On hearts that break and give no sign
 Save whitening lip and fading tresses,
 Still Death pours out his cordial wine,
 Slow-dropped from Misery's crushing presses.

“If singing breath or echoing chord
 To every hidden pang were given,
 What endless melodies were poured,
 As sad as earth, as sweet as heaven!”

Who were these eleventh-hour workmen? Can we identify them to-day? There is one class not directly referred to and yet who are represented in this company of eleventh-hour workmen. I

mean the men who have toiled all through the day but who have been discharged just before sundown. They are back again in the market-place doing nothing at the eleventh hour because somehow they have been unable to bear the strain, unable to keep up the pace, and so they have been cast adrift; and there they are in the market-place of life doing nothing. I sometimes think that is one of the most pitiless features of our modern life. The cry for young men, whose immature experience is but partially atoned for by a raw, exuberant energy, has tended to crowd out of the ranks of the world's workmen men of trained power and mature judgment but who have not the same appearance of energy which their younger brethren exhibit. And so we have what is known as the "dead line" across which a man is practically hopeless so far as activity or success is concerned. I say it is a cruel and a mistaken judgment, — although I do not know but there has been a reaction within more recent years and the prizes of life are again going to the men of maturer years. It is well that it should be so. But none the less the fact remains that in this company of eleventh-hour workmen there are many men to-day standing idle simply because they have somehow been unable to bear the strain of a whole day's work.

I remember once a young married man with a family who was out of employment through ill

health, and I secured him a place, which I thought was comparatively easy, in one of the factories in the city. On the day on which he went to take up his new job, I called at the house in the afternoon, and somewhat to my astonishment found him sitting there, haggard and hopeless. "What are you doing here?" I said. "Why aren't you working?" And he looked up, and all he said was, "I was na fet for the job." That is the pathos of life for so many. They have the spirit and the ambition, but they are not fit for the job.

The temptation for such men is, of course, to grow cynical and saturnine. They become narrow in sympathy. One of the saddest tragedies of life is when the worker becomes the mere critic, when the toil of the brain is substituted by the snarling of the tongue. There are some men who have no power of appreciation of another's work. They have not the grace to hold out a hand. They cannot even offer a prayer for the younger brother who is bearing the heat of the day. They are standing idle in the market-place, but they are making the air vocal with curses upon the workmen. Christ has a message for such men. We can use the eleventh hour in his service in the market-place just as well as in the vineyard. If we cannot be like Joshua fighting the hosts of evil, we can be like Aaron and Hur, who held up the hands of Moses. And

perhaps there is more real service of the man who can hold up the hands of a brother in prayer than of him who is down in the thick of the fight.

But others, again, are standing idle in the market-place because they have no sense of responsibility. They do not realize that God needs every man. There is no waste of life in the economy of God. Every life counts for something, and if you are not bearing your own burden of unselfish effort, you are increasing that burden for some one else. And yet how comparatively few carry in their souls the sense of personal responsibility for the uplifting of the world! You take, for example, the great charities of this city, and it is only comparatively a little handful of people who are carrying the burden of them. You go over the reports, and it is the same names that appear again and again. It is a certain select handful who are giving the large subscriptions and who are serving upon the boards of directors in the hospitals and charities of the city. Outside that little handful is this great mass of irresponsible people, standing idly in the market-place, doing nothing for the causes of God and humanity. I like to think of that remark of Jimmy Fulton, the village idiot in *Udessa*, Scotland, who was a notorious character and yet was an earnest Christian according to his lights. He was dying, and two or three had gathered around his bed-

side. One said, looking at poor Jimmy lying apparently unconscious, "I wonder if he has any sense of another world or of his personal responsibility to God at the day of judgment?" "Oh no," was the reply from another bystander, "poor Jimmy is only a fool." Whereupon the poor fellow opened his eyes and exclaimed, "Maybe, but I never heard yet that God asked what He did not give. He will judge me by my opportunities. I am a Christian. Dinna bury me like a beast." That is it. God does not ask from you or me any service for which He has not given us opportunity. He does not press upon us any responsibility for which He has not given us power. Why, then, are you standing all the day idle?

XXVII

MY FATHER'S GOD

My father's God, I will exalt him. — EXODUS xv. 2.

I TAKE these words as the charter of the Christian home. They emphasize what, after all, is the one supreme bulwark of national life. Destroy the sanctity of the home and you destroy the stability of the nation. Our text, therefore, is a vindication of that ancestral faith which, beneath all outward prosperity and behind all material wealth and luxury, has been for over three hundred years the leavening influence of American life. These words put the true emphasis on what has been in all the past the distinctive glory of America, as it must be in the future the source of her continued endurance,—the power of family religion, the heritage of faith bequeathed from father to son.

The question at once arises, Does this faith in our fathers' God mean to us to-day as much as it meant in an earlier generation? Is the home life of America to-day the depository of family religion, as it was not so many years ago? If not, are we as a people ready to face

the inevitable penalty? For notice what the secularizing of the home implies. It implies the disintegration of all that makes family life sweet and pure and tender. The very word "religion" itself means literally "a bond," something that binds man to man and man to God. Destroy religion in the home and you break the sacred bond of faith and love which binds its members together and binds them at last to the home eternal.

I would not speak pessimistically, but perhaps the greatest menace to Christian civilization to-day all the world over is the disintegration of family life. It is not that family affection means less than it always did, but it is that the sense of responsibility between husband and wife, the responsibility of parent to child and child to parent, counts for very much less than once it did. We are not sorry indeed that the sternness and harshness which too often marked the relation of parent to children in an earlier age are no longer with us; but the loss of parental dignity and parental example is a poor substitute even for harshness and sternness. Take, for instance, the appalling statistics of divorces and separations, increasing year by year. These things are to be regarded not so much as examples of incompatibility of temper as the results of depreciated ideals and debased views of married life. The home is made a mere con-

venience, and the one aim of hundreds and thousands of married people in this city is to get rid of family responsibilities and home duties at all costs and hazards. The result of it all is, as I say, the disintegration of the home, and the disintegration of the home means the decay of the nation. The civic virtues, unless they have their origin and consecration in the virtues of the home, are but the virtues of the theater.

What, then, is the remedy? I find it in these words of Moses: "My father's God." Your father had a God. Can your children say as much of you — that you too had a God? I am afraid that in a few years from now our children will have to change one line of the national anthem, and instead of singing,

"Our fathers' God, to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing,"

they will have to say, "Our grandfathers' God," or "Our great-grandfathers' God, Author of liberty, to Thee we sing."

You remember what Cowper wrote when some one brought him the portrait of his sainted mother:

"My boast is not that I deduce my birth
From loins enthroned and rulers of the earth;
But higher far my proud pretensions rise;
I sing of parents passed into the skies."

It is true, indeed, that a man can possess no more sacred heritage than a Christian ancestry, and yet the tragic thing to-day is that so many men with Christian ancestry are creating a pagan posterity.

In making this plea for the American home in its worthiest features, I note one or two practical suggestions which our text enforces.

I. These words of Moses remind us that the highest type of religion strikes its roots in the soil of family life. True religion begins in the home. The man who carries in his heart the memories of his father's God, who can find the strongest assurance for his faith in the impressions he received at his mother's knee, finds in religion a bulwark of strength not easily overcome. He may not, indeed, live up to these early impressions, he may wander far from the religious teachings of his childhood, nevertheless he cannot altogether escape the subtle and persistent influence which the memory of his father's God creates. Some of the most striking testimonies of biography witness to that fact. There is, for example, the oft-quoted assertion of Richard Cecil that the only thing which saved him from open infidelity, at a time when his mind was dark with doubt, was the Christian consistency of his father. That was an argument which he could not explain away, and it became the beacon star of his returning faith.

Or take the testimony of one of our own greatest men in a past generation. "At one period of my life," he writes, "I was on the point of becoming an atheist. I was held back by the recollection that when I was a little child, my mother, now a saint in heaven, taught me to say, 'Our Father who art in heaven.'" "It is to my mother," cries Augustine in his Confessions, "that I owe all. If I am thy child at all, O God, it is because Thou gavest me such a mother." "Go thy way, and God bless thee!" said the Bishop of Milan to Augustine's mother; "it cannot be that a child of so many prayers and tears shall perish."

Some of us who cannot say "My father's God" can say, "My mother's God." A mother's influence is the dearest and most potent under heaven. It follows us wheresoever we may journey. It abides with us to the end. When the shadows of death grow dark and the night of darkness gathers over us, the sweetness of our mother's voice and the memory of a mother's prayers are like the daystar's gleam across the curtained sky.

Our own, those to whose love and sympathy we owe so much, are often crowded out of the finer chambers of our nature, just as parents sometimes shut out their children from the best rooms in the house. Our own are not always admitted into our higher moods or more gracious

manners. The common, tawdry, untidy room of life is good enough for them. And so home religion withers, and "Our father's God" becomes an empty name.

True religion must be rooted in family life. It ought never to be a discovery which a man makes for himself in later life. It should be the atmosphere in which character from its earliest dawn unfolds and matures. It should be the nucleus around which gather the tenderest and most sacred memories of the home. Not merely the sorrows of life, but the joys of youth, the pleasures of childhood, the Christmas festivities, the summer frolics, the winter gatherings, — all these should be sanctified by the quiet undercurrent of family faith and prayer.

It is here, perhaps, where most of all the religion of the home can mean so much more to-day than it did, say, fifty years ago. To-day religion is a gentler, more tolerant spirit than it once was. However much you may glorify the family religion of an earlier generation, you must admit that far too often it was a tyranny that repulsed more often than it attracted. The dreadful fashion of making religion a Sunday task, in which long screeds of Scripture were learned by rote, in which church attendance became a nightmare of tedious misery, — that, I hope, is forever past. Undoubtedly for many men to-day these beautiful words, "My father's

God," awaken memories not altogether pleasant. That is not what I plead for. The American home cannot be built on the old foundations of creed and catechism, in which such questions as "effectual calling" were driven home by the flattened portion of the maternal slipper, "kindred souls" being thus brought into union. What I ask is that as far as possible religious formalism in the home shall be got rid of, and in its place let there be substituted a religious atmosphere in which prayer and the acknowledgment of God shall be a natural and healthy feature. Let it be admitted frankly that for multitudes of homes in New York family prayer, in the old-fashioned sense, is impossible. Well, you can make family prayer a kind of fetich or superstition. The old custom of reading through the Bible, chapter after chapter, morning after morning, without regard to their contents, as though the mere reading of the long list of the kings of Israel had a special charm, was not necessarily religion. Personally I would rather see each member of the home read a verse or two of a devotional psalm and kneel down quietly and reverently by himself than to have all meet together in a rush and scramble of indiscriminate prayer. At any rate, what I plead for, first of all, to-day is that the American home shall much more really and earnestly make the religion of Christ a definite feature in its daily life than it

has been doing. Take, for example, such a little thing as grace before meals. If the father of the home has not the courage to open his mouth to ask God's blessing on the family meal, he can at least set the example of bowing his head in silent prayer for a moment before the meal begins. God knows we have enough of the pagan in our modern feasting; let us cling to some remnant of the spiritual when we sit down to our elaborate banquets, by invoking the Divine blessing — for it is likely enough we shall need it before we get through.

It is in such ways that religion will strike its roots once more in the soil of home, and the next generation of American life will sing, in truer sense than ever before, "My father's God, I will exalt Him."

II. Our text reminds us, in the second place, that true religion not only begins in the home, but it is tested in the home. The real testing-place of a man's religion is his family life. If his faith shines clearly and most beautifully in the intercourse of his own family, his religion is a power in the world. "My father's God," says Moses. Then Moses was not in doubt as to whether his father had a God or not. His father's religion was not an enigma or a glaring contradiction. It needed no apology, it required no explanation. Moses did not need to say about old Amram, his father, after he died, "Why,

father was a good man, although it was not generally known. He was diffident, and never spoke about his religion, no doubt. No, he never prayed in public. He never talked about God. He swore occasionally, stayed out late nights, but all the same he was a good man." Not a bit of it. When Moses said "My father's God," he meant that the religion of his father had stood the test of forty years of quiet, faithful family life. It is from such homes that the great men of the world come forth. And that is my second plea for the American home to-day. I ask that our religion shall be so practicable, so homelike, that it will reveal its character most beautifully in the relations of family life. It is a pretty poor business when our religion is only a church-going garment that we hang up in the closet when service is over. It is a pretty low type of faith that can sing "Nearer, my God, to Thee," on Sunday, and then consign an unfortunate employee to the devil on Monday. If your religion or mine is worth anything at all, it will find its worthiest exercise in the little acts of kindly courtesy and thoughtfulness, in words of helpfulness and tenderness, to those who are closest to us day by day. Where parents are so revealing the power of their religion to stand the test of family care and sorrow and worry, through such habits of mutual helpfulness, it is not hard for the children to sing, "My father's

God, I will exalt Him." I would say, to parents, How far are you helping to perpetuate this spiritual heritage? What does your influence as Christians stand for in the home? Are your children learning to associate their faith with the life of the home? In future years will they learn to associate the deep truths of their faith with the memories of parental love?

The third suggestion which our text makes is that family religion is a man's best heritage. The faith which comes down to us through a long line of Christian ancestors is our highest blessing. Look at these men whom Moses was leading across the desert. Their fathers had at one time been men of wealth and influence in Egypt, but that was all gone. Through generations of pitiless slavery they had been reduced to abject poverty. Yet the one thing that stood the test was their faith in their father's God. It was that faith, the heritage that no Pharaoh could take from them, that was bringing them back to the land of promise. And to-day, if there is one nation more than another which owes everything to ancestral faith, it is America. God forbid that we should forget the memory of those who in faith and prayer crossed the wintry seas and on the imperishable foundation of trust in God laid the beginning of American character. To deny that faith, to cast it aside as useless, this is spiritual suicide.

You may laugh as you please at an old-fashioned religion, but in it lies the richest heritage of a nation. Cast it aside and you hand over to godless, unscrupulous, self-seeking, and unprincipled men the destiny of the future.

Now, of this faith the Christian home is the preserver. We do not want a national or state church in America. As the American people value their independence of thought, so all the more do we need a home church and a family altar. The man who ignores religion in America is a traitor to his country, not only robbing the family of its best riches, but the state of its most priceless heritage. Therefore, in making a plea for an American Christian home, I am pleading for a Christian federation that preserves the faith of the past and puts new life in its religion for future conquests and never ending triumphs in the name of our father's God. Can your children say of you, "My father's God, I will exalt Him"?

But there is an appeal also here not only to parents but to children, to young men and women growing up within the home. What is your father's God to you? With this spiritual heritage which you have received, what are you doing? It is possible to start an infidel posterity. And remember that no sinner is so hardened, no prodigal so hopeless, as he who comes from a Christian home. The devil puts a premium

upon the man who casts aside the influences of Christian parentage. Christian birth abused is a curse. We need find no more striking example of that than in the familiar story of Aaron Burr, who, coming from a Christian home, brilliant in intellect, yet made his life a shipwreck and closed his career in disgrace. At nineteen years of age his biographer tells us that he passed through a deep religious experience, and yet on his twentieth birthday he writes these words in his diary: "I have resolved never again to trouble myself about my soul's salvation." So he wrote, so he lived, and we know how he died. His father's God he despised, and his father's God forsook Him. Not only then for our own sakes, but for the sake of our nation's life, I make this plea to-day for the preservation of family prayer and family faith. On the perpetuation of that lies our hope for this country. What the future shall be we cannot tell. But hope rests on what is past, and we can discern an even brighter day for this great Christian nation. Through the vicissitudes that beset the path of human progress, wrestling with many problems, encompassed by many difficulties, yet still the path lies upward and onward before us. As our inspiration and our strength is this faith in our father's God, let us exalt Him.

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building

APR 19 1915	APR 3 - 1915	FEB 10 1920
APR 29 1915	APR 2 - 1915	
MAY 13 1915		
MAY 28 1915		
SEP 23 1915		
	4/12/22	
APR 21 1916		
OCT 27 1916		

100
100
100

